# 'Her Lion-Red Body, Her Wings of Glass': Iconography of the Gothic Body in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon

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## PART TWO: THE POETICS OF EMBODIMENT

# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I compiled this thesis and it is my own work.

26th May, 1997

# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the varied references to the gothic genre in the work of three contemporary British women writers: Angela Carter, Emma Tennant, and Fay Weldon. It shows that the use of gothic imagery in their fiction coincides with feminist revisions of representations of the female body and that this appearance of the gothic is more complex than the scope generally allowed by the critical term "Female Gothic". Whereas most critical approaches to the gothic are grounded in a depth hermeneutics, this thesis develops Sedgwick's attention to the surfaces of gothic imagery by focusing on the iconography manifest in representations of the female body. The novels under consideration increase the possibilities of the genre through a combination of traditional and innovative tropes. Such innovation is achieved through postmodernist conventions including the use of genre fragments, intertextuality, and pastiche, as well as the self-conscious invocation of modern theories of identity. Most significant is the practice of transforming metaphor into narrative, whereby static cultural images depicting the female body are mobilised in an exposure of their inherent humour and violence, the nexus of which is characteristically gothic.

In this literature three female figures may be discerned which are identifiable as gothic in their expression of entrapment both within the body and within a patriarchal system of cultural representation, and thus focus a number of feminist and poststructuralist concerns. The figure of the 'chokered' woman is read through a feminist critique of the gendered mind/body dichotomy central to Western culture. Next the presentation and subversion of the black female body is discussed as a figure of erotic alterity and the abject within colonialist discourse. The 'posthuman' body is explored as a product of the age of technological simulation, and is positioned in relation to the poetics of camp and the poststructuralist notion of the spectral presence of absence. In this fiction the female body functions as a 'screen' onto which these writers project their diverse inscriptions of the gothic.

# ILLUSTRATIONS

# ABBREVIATIONS

Citations of all primary sources appear directly in the text together with page numbers. The following abbreviations have been used:

ANGELA CARTER

*BC* *The Bloody Chamber* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986 [1979])

*BV* *Black Venus* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985)

*DrH* *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1972])

*H&V* *Heroes and Villains* (Harmondswoth: Penguin, 1981 [1969])

*MT* *The Magic Toyshop* (London: Virago, 1986 [1967])

*PNE* *The Passion of New Eve* (London: Virago, 1982 [1977])

EMMA TENNANT

*BM* *Black Marina* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)

*BS* *The Bad Sister* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989 [1978])

*F* *Faustine* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)

*HH* *The House of Hospitalities* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988 [1987])

*QS* *Queen of Stones/ Alice Fell* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987 [1982])

*WBW* *Woman Beware Woman* (London: Picador, 1984 [1983])

FAY WELDON

*FF* *Female Friends* (London: Pan Books, 1977 [1975]

*FWJ* *The Fat Woman's Joke* (London: Coronet, 1990 [1967])

*JM* *The Cloning of Joanna May* (London: Fontana, 1990 [1989])

*LS* *Little Sisters* (London: Coronet, 1992 [1977])

*SD* *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (London: Coronet, 1984 [1983])

# INTRODUCTION

In Sylvia Plath's poem "Stings", a female voice busily declares, "I/ have a self to recover".[1] The consequent exploration of the "brood cells" (l.12) of origin suggests that the location of her 'lost' self lies within a general matrix of possible selves. This search, and the poem's bold statement of intent, accords with the aims of many contemporary feminist novels in their preoccupation with female identity and with the "brood cells" of imagery from which it is composed. The resurrection, in Plath's poem, of the queen bee with "her lion-red body, her wings of glass" (l.55) corresponds to the focus in contemporary writing on the constitution of female identity as both embodied and imaged. Not surprisingly then, we find Plath's imagery is repeatedly summoned by themes explored in the work of Angela Carter, Emma Tennant, and Fay Weldon; as a point of transition and influence for these writers, both in relation to images of female identity and to configurations of the gothic genre, Plath's poetry inevitably 'haunts' the present examination of their fiction.

Considering Carter, Tennant, and Weldon in relation to one another and in terms of the gothic establishes a dual focus central to this thesis. This approach generates new perspectives on the contemporary gothic, and forges new ways of reading their work. Chapters One and Two form parallel movements from broad outlines of the 'high' gothic and 'female' gothic respectively, to the specific aspects of these fields which will ground the main argument of this thesis. Accordingly, a discussion of gothic criticism in the first chapter sharpens the focus to consider the readings of genre by Jameson and Sedgwick, while in the second the feminist gothic contextualises distinctive iconographic meanings projected by the female figure in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon.

Both the gothic genre and contemporary women's writing can be read

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[1] "Stings", ll.51-52 in Plath, Sylvia, *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981). All further references to Plath are to this edition and are given in the text.

within a postmodern context. Many of the novels discussed in the thesis are informed by a postmodernist aesthetic, employing textual devices such as irony, pastiche, and intertextuality. In a broader sense, the novels reflect the period of their production, evincing a post-modern, post-Freudian perspective. Therefore, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon perceive the gothic through a contemporary lens whereby twentieth-century theories of the subject colour their reading of the gothic. The consequent marriage of creative and critical threads in their writing is confirmed by Carter's claim that her "fiction is very often a kind of literary criticism".[2]

The historical and theoretical 'postmodern' gestures towards other 'posterities': hence Chapter 4 addresses the 'postcolonial' in the novelists' work, thereby making a new contribution to the discipline of postcolonial studies, while Chapter 5 considers the 'posthuman', a valuable term in distinguishing representations of a 'technological' female body. While these areas of interest are prominent in the postmodern cultural context, they also point to theories of subjectivity collectively regarded as 'poststructuralist'. The thesis makes reference then to several different theoretical points of view concerned with subjectivity - including Judith Butler on performance, Julia Kristeva on the abject, and Helen Tiffin on colonialist paradigms - importing these perspectives where they are pertinent to Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's treatment of the gothic.

Reading the work of these three writers together reveals several striking similarities, particularly in their figuration of the female body. "Bodies are screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements" of cultural signification,[3] and, accordingly, in novels by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon the figure of the gothic body, marked by the genre like "the fossils of shells" (l.12), articulates both old and new designs of the gothic. Through a vocabulary of colour and 'visual' signs (manifested, for instance, in the chokered woman of Chapter 3), meaning plays across the surface of the figure's "dangerous skin"

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[2] Haffenden, John, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.77-96 (p.79).

[3] Stone, Sandy, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto" in Epstein, Julia and Kristina Straub (eds), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p.294.

(l.27).

It has been argued that the female body "becomes desirable only by going to the limits as dead-body, fragmented-body, petrified-body".[4] These extreme conditions are reflected in the presentation of the posthuman, chokered, and black female figures respectively. Indicative of the petrifying effects of myth, these tropes become the focal points of various forms of the contemporary gothic, a genre inherently fascinated by the dead and fragmented body. Caught in a moment between the states of chthonic immanence and "flying" transcendence, the figure incorporates the implications of both at the same time. The female figures of the gothic body, composed of "body" and of "wings", stand out in relief in this thesis, as they do in contemporary British women's writing, since they come to 'speak' about the construction of images of femininity and about the transformations of the gothic, both relevant to casting a female "self" out of the "cells" of representation.

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[4] Buci-Glucksman, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage Publications, 1994 [1984]), p.101.

# PART ONE
# The Sediments of Genre

# CHAPTER ONE

## TRACING THE GOTHIC

### I. 'High' Gothic and the Search for Definition

In order to read the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon in terms of the gothic, we must first discover what purchase "gothic" has in the contemporary period. The genre now appears as a spectrum of diverse meanings and interpretations; it can no longer be fixed as, or reduced to, a single, definitive form.[1] Contemporary writing traces the shapes of the traditional gothic, yet also takes them as inspiration for new patterns. The women writers above warrant study as writers of the gothic although their novels cannot be classified as examples of the "gothic novel" *per se*. This is because the gothic appears within these new patterns which in turn are shaped by a postmodernist aesthetics. Generic fragments are a feature of this kind of writing; looking for traces of gothic, then, in contemporary writing means relating those fragments back to the broader spectrum to which they belong, and interpreting their role within an individual novel.

Both planes of 'gothic studies' contribute to and affect the other: historically 'old' gothic literature as well as theoretically 'new' perspectives inform contemporary examples of gothic writing in equal measure. Accordingly, an overview of each of these areas will provide a grounding for the exploration of gothic tropes in contemporary women's fiction. The present section outlines the general character of 'traditional' or 'high' gothic determined by evaluations of the genre. A central tension exists in gothic criticism between a limited historical and aesthetic basis for identifying the gothic *and* a broader, multiple-perspective approach which more adequately addresses late twentieth-century writing. Reading the gothic is further complicated when it is fused with other genres and with the specific intentions of an individual writer. Although the commonly designated characteristics

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[1] To reflect this spectrum of definitions, the thesis refers to 'gothic' in the lower case, rather than a monolithic and uniform 'Gothic'.

provide a general outline of the gothic, they are inadequate when reading contemporary examples of the genre. The postmodernist character of much late twentieth-century writing requires appropriate critical tools, and through a survey of prominent gothic criticism, possible models emerge for reading the gothic fragments in Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's fiction.

Several of the main emphases of gothic criticism outlined here are adopted and modified by critics of the "female" gothic (to be discussed in Chapter Two).[2] A number of preoccupations can be distinguished in the mainstream of gothic criticism (many of which must be modified when applied to contemporary texts), including: the terror/horror of the sublime, the dependence on a depth model of subjectivity, the genre's relation to the 'real' or distinctions between reality and fantasy, formal properties, the response of the reader, the interaction of fear and humour, and the gothic's apparent elusion of definitive generic classification. Before determining how these focal points are modified in studies of the female gothic, and how far they continue to be pertinent to contemporary gothic writing, their relation to fiction of the 'high' gothic will be our concern.

Retracing Early Forms

A dialogue between critics Robert Hume and Robert Platzner provides a pivotal discussion on the characteristics of the traditional gothic.[3] Their exchange illustrates the extent to which the gothic has become an interpretive battle-ground where differences in critical positions themselves are contested (borne out by the similar conflicts of interest in defining 'female' and 'feminist' gothic, as we will see in Chapter Two). Like many critics of the genre, Hume maps out an historical period during which the gothic was a clearly demarcated form. Often referred to as 'historical' gothic, we can site 'high'

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[2] This term was coined by Ellen Moers in her study *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1978 [1976]) - for preliminary purposes this is to be understood to mean gothic written by women.

[3] See Hume, Robert D., "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel", *PMLA*, 84 (March, 1969), pp.282-90, and Platzner, Robert L. and Robert D. Hume, "'Gothic Versus Romantic': A Rejoinder", *PMLA*, 86 (March, 1971), pp.266-74.

gothic between 1764 and 1820, or from Walpole to Maturin.[4] Rejecting Montague Summers' tri-partite classification of the gothic in 1938 (based on the sentimental, terror, and the historical),[5] Hume sets out to establish alternative means of classifying the genre by numbering three distinctive characteristics of the gothic: "a psychological interest", the prompting of an emotional response in the reader, and the use of the supernatural. All of these contribute to an atmosphere intended to stir the reader's imagination, and are organised around Edmund Burke's concept of the 'sublime', which itself became a means of distinguishing between the 'terror' gothic and 'horror' gothic. The difference between the two kinds, Hume explains, is that "terror opens the mind to the apprehension of the sublime", while "the repugnance involved in horror closes it".[6] The recognised "furniture" of high gothic - dark castles, supernatural events, life-threatening pursuits - were mechanisms used by the narrative to dilate the reader's senses in this way.[7]

Accounting for the movement in gothic literature from the pre-eminence of 'terror' gothic to that of 'horror' gothic, Hume points to a cultural shift in perception of the concepts of good and evil, in which these concepts "drew ever closer in the next two centuries" instead of remaining distinct. This change resulted both in depictions of the villain-heroes of 'horror' gothics as morally ambiguous characters, and, most significant to twentieth-century gothic, in textual emphasis moving from the 'outside' to the 'inside'. Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) are clear examples of the gothic novel in which "the suspense of external circumstance is de-emphasized in favor of increasing

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[4] David Punter sites the original genre between the 1760s and the 1820s, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1980), p.8; Joseph Wiesenfarth similarly marks 1818 as the year in which Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* "sandbagged the old Gothic novel", Intro, *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

[5] Summers, Montague, *The Gothic Quest: A History of The Gothic Novel* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964 [1938]).

[6] Hume, Robert D., "Gothic Versus Romantic", p.285.

[7] Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath use this term in *The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction* (London: Picador, 1993 [1991]), xi. These trappings were in fact also adopted for their sensationalistic effects by eighteenth-century writers of other forms of the novel.

psychological concern with moral ambiguity".[8] Blurred distinctions between the protagonist and his *doppelgänger* serve to highlight the dilemma of moral equivocation.

By identifying a set of thematic structures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century gothic novels, Hume argues that the eighteenth-century 'high' gothic is contiguous with present forms of the genre.[9] He thereby gathers the varied group of *Wuthering Heights*, *Moby Dick*, and Faulkner's *Sanctuary* into his classification of the gothic novel. Yet, Hume's insistence that the genre is essentially "one kind of treatment of the psychological problem of evil", leads him to the conclusion that the gothic is presently on the decline because "evil is explained away sociologically today".[10] This diagnosis forecloses the genre, denying the possibility that contemporary gothic fiction describes experiences of threat and disorientation without an adherence to the theologically-resonant term of "evil".[11]

To counter this critical limitation, Platzner addresses the limitations of the original 'terror' and 'horror' criteria for the genre, urging instead a widening of the critical approach:

> any reinterpretation of this genre must proceed beyond or outside of the constricting framework of late-eighteenth-century esthetic [*sic*] theory, for if we are to establish the groundwork for a new appraisal of the Gothic imagination we will have to provide for the theoretical differentiation of mythopoeic tendencies that cannot be accounted for in terms of either 'terror' or 'horror'.[12]

Such a "reinterpretation" not only provides new perspectives on traditional forms of the genre, but also makes flexibile critical approaches to those texts which do not conform to established gothic patterns and yet invite the characterisation 'gothic'. The critical machinery usually applied to 'high'

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[8] Hume, p.285.

[9] These components include a remote setting in time and/or space, the presence of a moral norm, a complex villain-hero who initiates the action, and the confusion of good and evil leading to anti-Christian feeling. Hume, pp.286-87.

[10] Hume, pp.287,290.

[11] While Platzner is principally interested in uncovering the ontological properties of the gothic, dismissing Hume's perspective as limited in its psychological stance, he does seem to agree that the subject of the genre is evil (even if he modifies this to read the *mystery* of evil).

[12] Platzner, Robert L. and Robert D. Hume, "'Gothic Versus Romantic': A Rejoinder", p.270.

gothic literature, such as the sublime, on which Hume's reading depends, is not necessary to the generic definition of a postmodern gothic text. As we will see in later chapters, the interpretation of recent gothic fiction requires new critical positions, not least to accommodate its engagement with twentieth-century critical discourses. Contemporary writers of the gothic often refer to specific theoretical models of identity or interpretations of literature which supersede models such as the Romantic sublime.[13] The Hume/Platzner dialogue exemplifies a central tension in gothic studies between an impulse to broaden the definitions of the genre, on the one hand, and a more reductive (usually historical or formal) approach, on the other.

The sublime does, however, raise the spectre of fantasy. Whether the work of the imagination demanded by the gothic circumscribed an escapist or transcendent form hints at the complex relation of the gothic to fantasy, a relation still central to contemporary gothic writing (see section two of this chapter). Literature of the 'high' gothic made possible the temporary illusion of the suspension of everyday life. As Coral Ann Howells has argued, the gothic offered novelists (and we might infer 'readers' too) "a retreat from insoluble problems", and "rendered their fears ultimately harmless".[14] Gothic writers were drawn to fantasy as it offered a fictional space in which to explore feelings of fear. Although this "dream landscape" of gothic constituted "a fictive world whose topography is shaped by and is the shape given to emotional responses to uncertainty and threat", the use of fantasy by gothic writers in the period 1790-1820 was nevertheless ordered to a certain extent by a capitulation to both moral and literary conventions.[15] When Howells claims that these writers were not entirely in control of their fantasies, she seems to discredit the delimiting effects of fictional convention. Noting the prevalence of imprisonment metaphors in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic literature, Howells herself perceives fantasy of this kind as a containing

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[13] Contemporary writers often provide clues to these new methods in the literary text itself. Emma Tennant, for example, includes a bibliography of psychoanalytic theory at the end of her novella, *Queen of Stones* (1982).

[14] Howells, Coral Ann, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), p.7.

[15] Howells, p.27.

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> anxieties occur with obsessional frequency in Gothic fiction and though sublimated into forms which appear fabulous and unlikely, they are at the same time distorted images of real emotional tensions and moral dilemmas.[16]

Yet, the gothic is not as "distorted" and disconnected from any real experience as Howells suggests. In fact, when the form is used most creatively, "the Gothic is often associated with the struggle to come to terms with rapid and potentially disastrous social change."[17] Thus David Jarrett, while conceding that the gothic could provide cathartic value for the reader, focuses on the socio-historical aspects of the gothic that make the form a more potent one than Howells' notion of the "imprisoned" gothic allows. Moreover, his reading of Radcliffe highlights two aspects of the gothic which are relevant to the 'female gothic' in both the past and present:

> Her Gothicism dramatises a longstanding social and historical crisis that involves the opposition of two worlds - the inner life of woman and her outer social role."[18]

This view accentuates the gothic's relation to real socio-cultural conditions, and highlights its appropriateness to contemporary feminist fiction which questions representations of female subjectivity dependent on this divided model. Referring to literature of the nineteenth century, Joseph Wiesenfarth similarly proposes that "the new Gothic novel presents individual thought and feeling at variance with social custom",[19] a view of the gothic that also provides an apt description of women's writing in which a female character experiences a sense of discontinuity with social expectations and imagery which normally define her - an estrangement from images of the self is a feature of women's writing (discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

The inside/outside dichotomy recurs throughout gothic criticism. Just as the gothic moved in ever-decreasing circles toward what Hume sees as a

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[16] Howells, p.7.

[17] Jarrett, David, *The Gothic Form in Fiction and its Relation to History* (Winchester Research Papers in the Humanities, 1980), p.10. Jarrett stresses the use of irony in this regard.

[18] Jarrett, p.15.

[19] Wiesenfarth, Joseph, *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p.10.

more intense "psychological concern with moral ambiguity", so Howells too finds that

> [w]ith Gothic novels the stability of the external world breaks down...[and] has become interiorised, translated into the private world of imagination and neurotic sensibility.[20]

The tension implicit in presenting both the subjective world of private experience and the objective world to which the individual relates, is commonly regarded as one of the most salient features of gothic narrative and is central to a number of critical evaluations.

For instance, the presentation of public and private realms as a dualistic system, according to George Haggerty, is used to reaffirm a sense of the nature of "civilized" life; gothic fiction, then, displays a need "to resolve such duality".[21] In an essay on *Frankenstein*, David Punter further makes plain the characteristic nature of this dichotomy:

> The landscape here is one in which inner and outer worlds have become fatally fragmented, and we can connect this fragmentation with the phenomena of Gothic in general.[22]

The importance of this construction for interpretations of gothic writing - "Inside and outside *is* the Gothic dimension"[23] - lies in its tropic relevance to many diverse methodologies, articulating oppositions within psychological, geographic, and somatic thematics. This dichotomy stands as a key issue in readings of contemporary gothic.

To identify a common trope in gothic literature and criticism is not, however, to fix the genre in terms of meaning. It is impossible to read any one critical view on the gothic as more valid than another because the gothic cannot be reduced to a specific design: "indeterminacy is inherent to its nature."[24] Indeed, Haggerty describes the majority of criticism on the gothic

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[20] Howells, p.26.

[21] Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction/ Gothic Form* (University Park & London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p.21. Haggerty too recognises an inconclusiveness in the gothic, and concentrates his attentions on its formal properties and their effects on the reader.

[22] Punter, "Narrative and Psychology in Gothic Fiction" in Graham, *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression* (New York: AMS, 1989), pp.1-25.

[23] Madoff, Mark S., "Inside, Outside, and the Gothic Locked-Room Mystery", in Graham, p.49, emphasis added.

[24] Haggerty, p.8.

as "impressionistic", arguing that none of it can adequately explain the gothic's generic identity. His answer to this short-coming in the criticism is to concentrate on the structure of gothic fiction. If "Gothic form is affective form", then that gothic fiction is "primarily structured so as to elicit particular responses in the reader."[25]

Resorting to the formal as an explanation for the variety of readings which the gothic elicits, Haggerty's analysis of form hinges on a distinction within gothic fiction between the novel and the tale. Here, the latter provides "insight into the nature of generic distinction and literary expression" which the novel cannot. The tale is presented as the crystallisation of all gothic potential: it can "answer the ontological and epistemological, as well as the structural demands of the Gothicists".[26] The shorter formula, as Chris Baldick writes, reduces "the cumbersome conventional machinery to its essential elements".[27] Certainly a number of Carter's tales can offer an abbreviated showcase for gothic imagery, but not all contemporary gothic writing can be wedged into this format.

Frequently, the gothic has been defined not by form or content, but by a factor beyond the text itself: the reader. Whereas evaluations of the 'female gothic' consider the *gender* of the reader (see Chapter 2, section I), here an interest in the response of the reader is paramount. As the genre developed, gothic fiction sought to "involve the reader in a new way".[28] Haggerty extends this claim by suggesting that Hume has pinpointed the most important aspect of gothic fiction: that "[i]ts primary formal aim is the emotional and psychological involvement of the reader."[29] It is difficult to rely on a feature such as this, that cannot easily be quantified, for the measurement of 'true'

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[25] Haggerty, p.8. Haggerty privileges an analytical approach over an interpretive study of the genre.

[26] Haggerty, p.14.

[27] Baldick, Chris (ed), *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xviii. Explaining his editorial guidelines, Baldick provides three different, and gradually narrowing, definitions culminating in an obsession with "old buildings as sites of human decay", xix-xx.

[28] Hume, p.284.

[29] Haggerty, p.18.

gothic. Even more important, in regard to contemporary gothic, is the kind of response elicited by gothic fiction in terms of its period. Accordingly, when we look at examples of twentieth-century gothic in subsequent chapters, it will become clear that it is now often an *intellectual* involvement by the reader, rather than an emotional one, which is stimulated by the recognition of gothic imagery.

The evolution from the emotional to the intellectual (and by association, intertextual) as the nature of the reader's engagement with gothic fiction does not preclude the persistence of fear and humour in contemporary literature. Two central features of early gothic, the operations of fear and humour are topical in gothic criticism and will be seen in modified form in the category 'female gothic'. In Robert Heilman's much-quoted phrase, "the discovery and release of new patterns of feeling", we find another means of charting development from 'old' gothic to the 'new'.[30] Calling the 'old' variety 'primitive' with its "crude mechanisms of fear", Heilman points to an emendation of the old gothic which, with an interest in depth and content characteristic of gothic criticism in general, "looks beyond familiar surfaces".[31] Brontë's interest in "probing psychic disturbance",[32] relocates the extra-rational (the 'new patterns of feeling') from traditional descriptions of marvellous circumstances, to the previously untapped exigencies of 'real' life. The charting of a heroine's emotional collapse becomes the new topographical project of the gothic, confirming the genre as a representation of interior exploration, and describing an intimate source of fear in this 'new' gothic.

The publication of *Wuthering Heights* marks an evolutionary stage of the genre in that it relocates the origins of dread; this novel was responsible for what Wiesenfarth calls the "domestication" of the gothic. Reducing the scale, but not the intensity of the gothic setting, Emily Brontë condenses the

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[30] Heilman, Robert B., "Charlotte Brontë's 'New' Gothic" in Rathburn, Robert and Martin Steinmann Jr. (eds), *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p.121.

[31] Heilman, p.118.

[32] Heilman, p.126.

conventions of gothic fantasy into a domestic shape, where "death and damnation become table talk".[33] Similarly, in *Great Expectations*, Dickens has "personalized" the high gothic in that he has "telescoped the charnel house and the castle of old Gothic fiction into a bourgeois manor house."[34] The abandonment of 'foreign' settings in favour of locations which were more recognisable to a nineteenth-century readership, is later taken to extremes when the location of gothic dread *is* the body itself (a location frequently explored in the 'female gothic').

In a study of the interactive operations of fear and humour in gothic fiction,[35] Paul Lewis demonstrates that the reactions of fear and humour can arise from the same source of stimulation - usually when something "anti-expected" happens. This reaction is conceived in terms of an "incongruity theory", and if we look at the gothic through this model, then we may recognise that the genre is

> perched on the thin line between humor and fear and that there are a variety of ways in which the relationship between these emotions can be manipulated by writers.[36]

While this refers to a boundary experienced by the reader, it is reminiscent of Madoff's statement about the significance of borders and their transgression in the genre: "inside and outside is the *line* along which the protagonists move".[37] This narrative precipice is the setting for a negotiation of identity when faced with the otherness and loss revealed in the moments of fear and laughter.

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[33] Wiesenfarth, p.67.

[34] Wiesenfarth, p.85.

[35] Austen's *Northanger Abbey* is an example of a novel in which "humor overwhelms fear", in contrast to Poe's tales where fear displaces humour; *Moby Dick* manages both as a a work "whose objective examination of incongruities is supported by a sense of humor and an ability to fear". Lewis' discussion of the various permutations of these responses repeats the conclusion we have already seen: that gothic novelists in particular capitalise on these human responses.

[36] Lewis, Paul, "Mysterious Laughter: Humor and Fear in Gothic Fiction" *Genre* XIV (Fall, 1981), pp. 309-27 (p.312). Victor Sage similarly notes how the combination of these responses is frequently used in the mechanisms of early gothic fiction as "the driving force of theatrical farce". See "Gothic Laughter: Farce and Horror in Five Texts", *Gothick Origins*, pp. 190-203 (p.203).

[37] Madoff, in Graham, p.49.

The operation of humour in the gothic, as in the case of fear, helps to delineate differing forms of the genre. Heilman, for example, identifies the "anti-Gothic"[38] in modifications which work against the grain of a "straight" gothic, and where the consequent effect is the "partial sterilization of the banal Gothic by dry factuality and humor".[39] Here, as in some contemporary women's writing, structural traces of the gothic remain, fossilized through this comic treatment, while humour also gives life to the 'new' form. Similarly, Lewis notes a distinction between the use of humour in 'straight' gothic and 'mock' gothic:

> If the Gothic uses humor to sustain an exploration of incongruity/mystery,...the mock Gothic uses humorous irony and exaggeration to repudiate the encounter with the unknown and feared.[40]

Lewis adopts *Northanger Abbey* as an example of the mock gothic, in which the humour is "defensive and limiting".[41] His view of its limiting action is informed by Bergson's view of humour as a means of social control. In a decisive aspect of the gothic's relationship with the real, then, the mock gothic "draws a circle around what it defines as reality and sanity and then ridicules the Gothic for falling outside the circle."[42] Lewis is critical of this aspect of Austen's novel, arguing that reality is misrepresented insofar as the novel fails to account for the inhumanity of the Industrial Revolution and does not recognise that social conditions were "as savage as anything the Gothic novelists had been able to imagine or describe."[43]

The judicial use of humour and/or fear, a combination which Sage has

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[38] Baldick adopts this term to make a broader distinction, arguing that "literary Gothic is really anti-Gothic", due to "its ingrained distrust of medieval civilization and its representations of the past primarily in terms of tyranny and superstition". Baldick, xiii.

[39] Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's 'New' Gothic", p.123. These two stylistic additions are part of a clearly recognisable strategy in novels by contemporary women writers.

[40] Lewis, p.316.

[41] Lewis, p.318.

[42] Lewis, p.327 (n.14), p.318.

[43] Lewis, pp.317-18.

called the "gothic icon of simultaneous fear and laughter",[44] often creates a narrative tension central to the genre. Appearing in Tennant's and Weldon's writing too (often as an effect of "black humour"; see Chapter 2, section III), this alliance occurs in one of Carter's novels. In *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, Carter creates a world where the real and unreal are indistinguishable, and Desiderio's disorientation is expressed in precisely these terms: "I was torn between mirth and horror". (*DrH*, p.91)

Finally, an increasing ambiguity regarding the relation of gothic fiction to a sense of the 'real', as occurs in Carter's text, brings us to one of the most telling conclusions about contemporary forms of the gothic: that the subject matter of gothic writing is increasingly bound up with a perception of contemporary reality.[45] This does not mean that the gothic after the eighteenth century shows a tendency to fully embrace realism, but rather that our present reality can be seen to exhibit certain characteristics found in a traditional gothic text. Frederick Frank, for instance, in his *Guide to the Gothic*, notes a bridging of the gap

> between the outrageous fantasies of the eighteenth century Gothic novel and the violent and chaotic historical and psychological facts of the twentieth century.[46]

While Frank sees the gothic genre as relevant to and reflective of historical processes past and present, in his view the only modern gothic text is contemporary reality itself. Although he admits to the current relevance of the concept of 'the gothic', Frank consequently rejects the idea that a literature of this name still exists. Nevertheless, this inverted view accords with both the

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[44] Smith, Alan Lloyd and Victor Sage, *Gothick Origins and Innovations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), p.194. Sage refers here to the tropic figure which epitomises the gothic in this regard: the *danse-macabre*.

[45] Joseph Wiesenfarth too notes a development in the gothic's relationship with 'the real'. For instance, as the form is transformed into a personalised account of experience, this is reflected in the shift away from an identity search based on a genealogical, inherited past, and becomes an investigation of the present in which one is only concerned with one's immediate personal identity. Wiesenfarth, Joseph, *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), pp.11-16.

[46] Frank, Frederick S., *Guide to the Gothic: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1984), p.xi. He cites the impact of Freud on the criticism of the gothic as the source of this interpretation of the traditional genre; indeed, it has often been suggested that Freud's case studies themselves can be read as gothic tales, even as Hoffmann's *Sandman* became an important text to psychoanalysis. See Punter in Graham, pp.1-10.

gothic preoccupations in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, and with postmodernist theorisations of the real.

Traces in the Twentieth Century

As we have seen, the definitions of gothic arising from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature are regarded by some as "relevant as critical parameters"[47] for a modern-day discussion of the genre. Yet these do not always coincide with developments of the genre in the twentieth-century. Accordingly, in his examination of a wide range of gothic texts from an historical perspective as well as a sociological one, Punter makes the case that the gothic can be understood either as an historically-delimited genre *or* as a more wide-ranging and persistent tendency within fiction as a whole[48] - a tension in gothic studies which this chapter seeks to address. Punter may recognise a period of high gothic, but he rejects the conservative stance of critics like Montague Summers or Devendra Varma who seem to regard the plain historicity of the gothic as its principal point of merit.[49] Instead, Punter applauds the work of Edith Birkhead and Michael Sadleir, who recognise in the gothic

> a gesture of defiance, albeit unsystematic and often abortive, in the face of the established conventions of eighteenth century life and literature.[50]

This act of defiance, then, suggests a wider relevance of the gothic which moves it beyond a discussion centered on historically specific themes and imagery.

Accordingly, Punter espouses the need for a *dialectical* analysis of the genre over time; that is, interpretation of a gothic text must take account both

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[47] Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (New York: Longman, 1980), p.402.

[48] Punter, p.14.

[49] In *The Gothic Form in Fiction*, Jarrett has dismissed Summers' study of the gothic as "eccentric" and Varma's as "inferior", p.32, n.1. Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (1938); Varma, *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England* (1957).

[50] Sadleir, cited in Punter, p.15. Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* (1921); Sadleir, *The Northanger Novels: A Footnote to Jane Austen* (1927).

of its place in generic history and its cultural relevance in its contemporary period. His project undertakes to combine the cultural significance of early gothic novels, and the relation between the gothic and various cultural formations in which it has persisted since that early period. By adopting this argument to look at contemporary women's fiction in terms of the gothic, we also gain a fuller understanding of both the traditional genre and its transformations. A dialectical analysis can provide a broader framework in which to read the gothic, since

> such an enterprise has to rest on perceiving the Gothic as a way of relating to the real...[that] has forms of continuity which we can trace right through from the eighteenth century writers to the contemporary world.[51]

This approach eschews the structuralist method of enumerating common themes irrespective of historical period, in favour of identifying a possible commonality based on an understanding of cultural context. In this regard, Punter's project anticipates Fredric Jameson's diachronic model of generic interpretation (discussed in section III of this chapter).

Punter's insistence that the genre is essentially a response to and a reaction against bourgeois society enables him to read a wide range of modern fiction within the rubric of twentieth-century gothic. His study supports the existence of a contemporary form of the genre which is both distinct from, and related to, the earlier version.[52] In a chapter entitled "Modern Perceptions of the Gothic", Punter suggests that the contemporary gothic can accommodate a generous range of meanings beyond the older, more limited definition of the term 'gothic' since that has now lost much of its precision. The new literary 'landscape' of the gothic, where we would want to site Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, is not wholly unrecognisable as the site of early gothic writing, yet it has a distinctly modern spirit:

Gothic writing still bears a close relation to social fears and

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[51] Punter, p.14.

[52] Nevertheless, Jarrett for one finds Punter's study "disappointing in its treatment of American and modern English Gothic", Jarrett, p.32, n.1. He is right to point out that few critics have considered the contemporary gothic in its cultural-historical context; he does not, however, explain the nature of his disappointment here. (The second edition (1996) of Punter's study in two volumes covers the contemporary period more fully.)

> taboos, but enormous changes have occurred both in the nature and degree of consciousness of those fears, and also in the literary self-consciousness of the medium through which they pass.[53]

Attention to this "self-consciousness" is vital to an understanding of the gothic in the three women writers' work. Related to the currency of post-Freudian ideas and language used in both contemporary gothic fiction and its criticism, it is a crucial factor in interpreting postmodernist treatments of the genre, refracted as they are through a multiplicity of theoretical positions. In a discussion of the fragmentation of genre in the postmodern era and in postmodernist techniques (in section II), we will see how literary self-consciousness affects our reading of the gothic. Similarly, an examination of contemporary women's writing (in Chapter 2, section III) reveals the pattern of influence discernible in their fiction, whereby the women's movement informed their views of Freud which in turn informs their 'reading' of the gothic. The transformations of new gothic writing are predicated on a confluence of post-Freudian and poststructuralist ideas. Reading the contemporary gothic with these issues in mind, and in relation to its cultural context, enables us to see that the texts themselves evince an awareness of these theoretical developments and to discern how the gothic engages with postmodern ideas.

The directions of 'new' criticism of the genre, and the gothic's acute relevance in the present (as opposed to Frank's view of its redundancy), are summed up by David Kelly in his challenging essay, "The Gothic Game". Here he accounts for the renewed interest in the gothic over the last twenty years as "the current postmodern sense of our own transgressive novelty".[54] A "valorization of the transgressive" in the contemporary period attends the gothic text, itself long considered the site of potential rebellion and liberation. Hence, it is now feasible to read postmodern criticism of the genre as

> confirming the Gothic within the modern dynamic of transgression, whereby the text is both recruited to and provides

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[53] Punter, p.374.

[54] Kelly, David, "The Gothic Game", *Sydney Studies in English*, vol. 15 (Australia: 1989-90), pp. 106-24 (p.108).

> evidence for the reading of literary modernity as the trace of the transgressive Other.[55]

Kelly argues that the trends of current criticism of the gothic are in fact "determined in part by the wilfulness of modernity itself".[56] In order to prove his point, he outlines four different modes of analysis applied to *Frankenstein*, emphasising the "figurative content" common to Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial readings of the novel.[57]

Not only are these among the more prevalent modes of interpretation of the gothic (and in echoing Haggerty's point earlier, we cannot privilege one line of criticism over another as a more 'accurate' account of the gothic), but these examples aim to show that Kelly's evaluation of the critical approaches is important, for he argues that whatever their primary methodology, the thrust of the criticism is the same: "a liberating return of the repressed".[58] Rather than repeating the essentialising tendencies of some critics, Kelly seeks to demonstrate that the gothic text is a "cryptogram", a site of dynamic textual experimentation, which itself demands deciphering. The figurative content of

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[55] Kelly, p.109.

[56] Kelly, p.113. He points out that modernity itself arises out of a series of transgressions.

[57] Kelly, pp.111-12. Franco Moretti's analysis reads the gothic as representing the basic struggles within industrialist society, with the monster embodying the nameless proletariat and Frankenstein the producer/inventor; he sees the gothic as "illiberal" in its promotion of an integrated society. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: NLB, 1983). Ellen Moers' reading of the novel as a birth metaphor suggests that the gothic provides liberating expression for Mary Shelley herself; articulating the culturally repressed idea that childbirth and maternity were not always the experiences of familial harmony which they were socially supposed to be. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Virago, 1978 [1976]). Gilbert and Gubar have chosen to emphasise the role of the woman writer in the nineteenth century in their reading of Shelley's novel, reading it as a "mock *Paradise Lost*", reflecting Shelley's own "psycho-drama". In this case, *Frankenstein* highlights the writer's experience of the complicity of literature, as a reflection of patriarchal values, in maintaining a constrictive socio-cultural environment. The effects of this experience resulted in Shelley's "monologue of terrorized delirium". Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979). Gayatri Spivak's reading of the novel centres on an interest in concepts of the self in nineteenth-century imperialism. Spivak argues that "the text problematizes the relationship between the formally distinct functions of sexual reproduction...and the production of the social subject". The text is challenging because it conflates these two issues in the single character of Victor Frankenstein. When Frankenstein decides he cannot reproduce a mate for the monster, Spivak reads this as a failure at both the sexual and social levels, and sees the didacticism of the text making a direct critique of contemporary thought on the origins of society through the (male) subject. Gayatri Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" in Gates, *'Race', Writing and Difference* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985).

[58] Kelly, p.113.

much contemporary criticism of the gothic confirms the subversive potency of the gothic - what Punter identifies as its "gesture of defiance". Ultimately, these critical practices engage in a "game" in which ever-increasing levels of textual subversion and transgression are uncovered and decoded by critics. The novel of the high gothic is in fact treated by contemporary theory as a ludic, neo-*postmodernist* text.[59] This theoretical view of the older gothic has itself become embedded in contemporary fiction which includes the gothic. Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's writing reveals a double sense of the gothic: looking back *to* early gothic writing *through* contemporary critical perspectives.

The image of the "cryptogram", then, provides a focus in determining the similarities between postmodern and gothic writing. Amongst other characteristics, including a ludic quality, they share an evasion of definitive meaning or closure and a self-conscious textuality. The first point here requires brief attention. As we have seen, critics have repeatedly professed the apparent evasion of conclusive classification which the gothic seems to enact; the genre apparently offers a peculiarly strong resistance to critical totalisation or reduction. However, it is worth noting that this is, in fact, the nature of all writing:

> If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field - that is, language and a finite language - excludes totalization.[60]

My argument then necessarily acknowledges the "infiniteness" of the field of gothic studies, even as it offers an account of the genre in some postmodern writing. The apparent promise of a meaning behind or within the text (pointing to an infinite deferral of resolution and revelation), *also* bespeaks the fundamental character of the act of interpretation. In section IV of this chapter, a method of interpretation focussing on surfaces instead of 'depths' will become central to our explication of the contemporary gothic, as the conventional hermeneutic proves insufficient for the reading of fiction that

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[59] Mishra considers this form as an earlier moment of the postmodern, claiming that "the gothic sublime insinuates a postmodernity in its undermining of a realist economy of meaning". Mishra, Vijay, *The Gothic Sublime* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p.25.

[60] Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.289.

highlights its own bright surfaces as much as its hidden depths.

The self-conscious aspect of the postmodern and the gothic leads to the kind of ironic moment which reveals "the operation of artifice upon the real."[61] The effect of 'de-naturalisation' which accompanies such a moment is common in women's writing, since it explores boundaries between nature and culture in regard to the constitution of female identity. The self-consciousness of textuality further implies that no text is definitively 'true'; hence the re-evaluation of the status of discourses as "metafiction", including those of philosophy, history, and colonialist narratives (all of which are made to appear as culturally determined 'vocabularies' in the chapters to follow).[62] The gothic genre is likewise reconfigured through this perspective, as "a text which actively contests the principle of certainty itself"[63] in its participation in an "operation of artifice upon the real".

## II. The Fantastic and Postmodernism

The relation of the gothic genre to the mode of the fantastic necessarily informs any study of the gothic in a postmodern context and illuminates the difficulties of its current definition. After considering some of the principal works of criticism on the gothic, the inadequacy of critical discussion on contemporary gothic literature is evident. Certainly Punter for one has shown that threads of the traditional gothic remain visible in modern British and American fiction, yet the bulk of critical attention focuses on the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even if the term itself has now branched out into multifarious meanings and applications, and can no longer be employed to describe a unified literary genre, the word "gothic" is still commonly applied to individual literary works being written today. Perhaps one reason for its apparent dissolution or the lack of close attention to its fragmented forms, is the fact that it has been subsumed by more general preoccupations with descriptions of genre breakdown and composite forms of

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[61] Kelly, p.115.

[62] See Hutcheon, Linda, *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988).

[63] Kelly, p.122.

fiction characteristic of postmodernist literature. In surveys of contemporary British fiction, the gothic is given passing mention to describe an aspect of a novel, but based on some 'common' 'sense' of what this means.[64] This section will try to recover some trace of the subject of the contemporary gothic within recent explorations of the postmodern fantastic as it shares many of the fantastic's transformations.

The Role of the Fantastic

A more complete understanding of the contemporary gothic may be developed not only by examining the impact on the gothic of postmodernist writing and ideas, but also by looking at recent trends in the study of fantastic literature and in the acknowledged overlap between the two categories.[65] While there are those who wish to confine the fantastic to the nineteenth century and earlier (reflecting a parallel tendency in the criticism of the gothic), others have found a new synthesis of the mode within twentieth-century texts. Neil Cornwell attempts to place the debate about the fantastic in a wider contemporary context, while Rosemary Jackson's definitions of the mode share his acknowledgement of a relationship between the fantastic and the gothic.

Jackson's view of development in fantastic literature coincides with those critical statements on the gothic discussed above insofar as the fantastic novel began to minimize its representation of the external world in favour of an internal one. She implies that this generic development in the gothic has taken place as part of a greater shift in literary practice generally:

> From Gothic fiction onwards, there is a gradual transition from the marvellous to the uncanny - the history of the survival of Gothic horror is one of progressive internalization and

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[64] Malcolm Bradbury, for instance, refers on the one hand to Carter's gothic as a move towards "radical surrealism", emphasising her characters of dolls, clowns, and movie queens; while on the other hand, Ian McEwan's novel, *The Cement Garden*, is a "grimly Gothic tale...of incest, transvestism, and regression". *The Modern British Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1993), pp.387, 391.

[65] For a discussion on the different uses of terminology ('fantasy' or 'fantastic') see Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1990), pp.27-31. I have chosen to use the term 'the fantastic' here because this can describe a mode and an impulse, and seems to allow for broader interpretation than the stricter category of 'fantasy'. It is also closer to the operation of the 'gothic' within contemporary literature.

recognition of fears as generated by the self.[66]

In addition to this modulation from the supernatural (or the seemingly unreal in the external world), to the presentation of internalised anxieties in an individual psyche, there are further parallels between the operations of the fantastic and the gothic. The form of the fantastic now works mainly by implication, intuition, and inference, making it a difficult form to capture critically, while in contemporary fiction, the gothic character of a narrative may often depend more on inference and allusion, than the obvious inclusion of a haunted castle. Haggerty's charge of "impressionism" then is as relevant to gothic literary texts as it is to the practice of gothic criticism.

Those critics who delineate the gothic as a genre strictly consistent with its origins, often cannot satisfactorily account for the residual evidence of the gothic in literature written after the early nineteenth century. Its imbrication with the fantastic, however, offers one explanation for its reconfigured appearance. As Jackson points out, these same critics readily admit to an early formative connection between the traditional genre and the new hybrid "gothic-fantastic",[67] since fantasy's "immediate roots lie in that literature of unreason and terror which has been designated 'Gothic'".[68] Yet where the connection to 'high' gothic is less apparent, or even non-existent, reference to forms of the fantastic becomes pertinent in evaluations of contemporary gothic.

In exploring recent additions to the "gothic" spectrum, Alastair Fowler has offered a worthwhile distinction between the phenomenon of the earlier, historically-defined genre and the generic fragments we find scattered throughout modern fiction: "The gothic romance...yielded a gothic mode that outlasted it and was applied to [diverse] kinds."[69] In contemporary literature it is possible to detect this "gothic mode" in co-operation with forms of the fantastic (or the gothic as a genre within the *mode* of the fantastic). In either

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[66] Jackson, Rosemary, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988 [1981]), p.24.

[67] Cornwell, p.153.

[68] Jackson, p.95.

[69] Fowler, Alastair, *Kinds of Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p.109.

case, the gothic and the fantastic are now closely identified in much contemporary fiction and its criticism, and many of the characteristics which constitute the fantastic are equally relevant to the gothic.

The gothic and the fantastic relate to one another along several not entirely distinct axes: historical, structural, and thematic. Certainly their origins seem closely related; Michel Foucault has argued that there is a connection between the emergence of the fantastic and the beginnings of a dialectical discourse of reason and unreason, of the phenomenon of sadism, and of the fascination with sexual desire, death, and madness.[70] (The female figures discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus such themes of desire and violence as they appear in contemporary women's writing.) These areas are easily recognisable as the favoured subject matter of the early gothic, and it is not difficult to see how the interests of fantastic and gothic fiction may have developed in the climate of the eighteenth century such as the one Foucault describes.

As a form which identifies 'otherness', the gothic has an important role within culture; Tzvetan Todorov, instead, insists on the operation of language as the fantastic's defining aspect. In his structural approach to the fantastic, Todorov locates the 'fantastic effect' in the experience of 'hesitation' (between the natural and the marvellous) in the reading of a text, thus emphasising the relationship between the narrative (or character) and the reader. From this moment of hesitation, the reader is never returned to a position of confidence.[71] A fundamental operation of fantastic literature may seem central to the reading of the gothic if this Todorovian model is applied to the gothic to explain the structural nature of the genre. Punter's point about the suspension of conventional codes within the gothic's "different sphere" also emphasises what is essentially a formal tenet of the fantastic.[72]

Many theme clusters prevalent in the fantastic have their origins in the

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[70] This is the subject of Foucault's argument in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 1993 [1961]).

[71] Jackson, p.29. See Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973).

[72] Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p.405. Ethical and behavioural codes are shown by gothic writers to be relative.

early gothic. The theme of metamorphosis, for example, "with its stress upon instability of natural forms",[73] is a literary device frequently found in the gothic, from Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1896) to Fay Weldon's modern gothic, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (1983) (see Chapter 5). Frequently the settings in fantastic literature are indebted to the gothic's conventions: "Enclosures are central to modern fantasy, from the dark, threatening edifices and castles of Gothic fiction...to new enclosures of metropolitan nightmare."[74] In another account of this modernisation, Cornwell explains a change in the fantastic mode of writing through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope', a term which describes the play within narrative of spatial and temporal perspectives. An increased elasticity in the narrative chronotope in the nineteenth century accounts for the application of "castle time" in a novel such as *Wuthering Heights* and the imaginative transformation of the gothic castle to an urban setting, as the novel begins to reflect its modern context.[75] Unless the reader of the gothic-fantastic has a cursory knowledge of these generic transformations, the urban setting would not necessarily resonate with gothic undertones. Similarly, Weldon's *She-Devil* alludes to *Frankenstein* to underline the gothic character of her protagonist's surgical metamorphosis.

The term 'fantastic' not only delineates transcendent narratives of fantasy, but also fiction which interrogates the nature of reality without fully embracing realism as a genre. Describing the first signs of a shift from the supernatural to the psychological as a source of fear, Jackson points to an experience of alienation which might also describe modern gothic: alienation both from the matrix of culture (and its representations of the self) and from a perceived 'other' version within the self. She contends that, from *Frankenstein* onwards,

fantastic narratives are clearly secularized: the 'other' is no

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[73] Jackson, p.81.

[74] Jackson, p.46. I would emphasise that this modernisation of the image of the gothic castle does not necessarily mean it is no longer 'gothic' in its use. To describe one of these new enclosures as 'fantastic' does not convey the thematic implications or the hinted narrative intentions of the term 'gothic'.

[75] Cornwell, p.69.

> longer designated as supernatural, but is an externalization of part of the self. The text is structured around a dialogue between the self and self *as* other, articulating the subject's relation to cultural law and to established 'truths', the truths of the establishment.[76]

In this summary a particular significance for women may easily be discerned when we read "cultural law" as patriarchal law in which the female subject's relation to a self represented *by* this system may indeed be one of estrangement. Images belonging to a familiar "matrix of culture" *intervene* in the female subject's perception of her self, and this distancing effect often leads to an experience of otherness *in* the self. (Cultural images which have this effect provide the focus for Chapters 3, 4, and 5.) Narrative models which articulate an experience of alienation include a text narrated from the perspective of a 'self' who represses the 'other', and a text narrated by the 'other' which tells of the construction (or cultural formation) of the self. The figure of Ruth in *She-Devil*, for instance, recounts the annihilation of her 'other' former self and the subsequent construction of her identity as Mary Fisher, negotiated through a series of cultural images of femininity. Weldon's novel, as an example of Jackson's double alienation in the fantastic, may be seen to perform a subversive function insofar as it exposes a reversal of the process of the subject's cultural formation. While images of 'disassembled' bodies of metamorphosis point to an emphasis on materiality in fantastic literature, they also serve to "oppose traditional categories of unitary selves" in their disclosure of this process of identity construction.[77]

A focus on "the social and political implications of literary forms",[78] such as the fantastic, is crucial to a fuller understanding of contemporary feminist fiction. Jackson's understanding of the fantastic remembers that such cultural issues have been central to gothic texts from the earliest

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[76] Jackson, p.55. Jackson's account of *Frankenstein* underplays the supernatural *mobility* of Shelley's monster.

[77] Jackson, pp.177-78. Jackson diverges from Todorov in her interest in psychoanalytical models, finding Freud's idea of the 'uncanny' to be quite useful. She understands the modern fantastic as a preoccupation with unconscious desire and its relation to the cultural order; the fantastic exposes this desire and thereby disrupts our conceptions of the known world.

[78] Jackson, p. 175. Todorov's argument is weak, Jackson contends, because it fails to consider these factors.

examples; incidents of social and sexual transgression, the violent breaking of taboos, have been recounted in modern fantasy from de Sade and the gothic onwards. It is in this context of breaking open established codes that Jackson refers to the work of McCullers, Plath, and Carter, as they have "all employed the fantastic to subvert *patriarchal* society."[79] Thus the gothic-fantastic is an appropriate form for a feminist poetics, while at the same time, writers find the material of the gothic-fantastic itself, reflecting certain social and political structures, to be ideal for feminist subversion. The diffusion of the gothic-fantastic into other areas of writing, such as magic realism or science fiction, can be discerned in the work of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, where the fantastic and realist modes collide (see Chapter 2, section II).

We can begin to count the number of mixed genres which have proliferated in postmodern fiction when reading Jackson's view on the relation of fantasy to realism. Like many critics of the fantastic, she denotes a literary spectrum along which she places her formal definitions: it is, she says,

> more helpful to define the fantastic as a literary *mode* rather than a genre, and to place it between the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic.[80]

This polar model itself suggests a range of possible combinations in the descriptive terms applied to fiction. Those who speak of a 'fantastic realism', for instance, propose the existence of a dialogue between the fantastic and the realistic in formal terms, within a single text.[81] The term 'magic realism' denotes a combination of the fantastic and the realistic, specifically informed by the narrative tone of banal response to the fantastic elements, treating them as equally real as those which are realistic. Like many of the other modes defined by the Todorovian scale, 'magical realism' is open to a fairly wide range of interpretation, and like the gothic in the contemporary period, resists definitive classification. In the work of Angela Carter and Emma

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[79] Jackson, p.104. It is worth noting that Jackson has read Moers' discussion of "female gothic" and adopts her list of contemporary writers, adding Carter. See pp.125 and 103, n.10.

[80] Jackson, p.32.

[81] In terms of the scale drawn between the marvellous and the mimetic, we tend to think of 'fantastic realism' as lying closer to the mimetic, since 'fantastic' qualifies 'realism', yet it is the presence of both elements which would give such a text its narrative tension.

Tennant, for instance, it is possible to read several of their novels as forms of gothic or magic realism or both.[82]

Similarly, the gothic contains the roots of surrealism: Heilman has pointed to Charlotte Brontë's gothic as instrumental in the introduction of surrealistic technique; Breton regarded surrealism as "a descendant of the early gothic romances"; and Cornwell mentions that surrealist images "are thought to have literary (Gothic-fantastic) origins".[83] Not only surrealism's struggle to collapse the barriers between the rational and the irrational marks its resemblance to the gothic, but also the genre's pleasure in fantastic phenomena in the 'real' world.

Just as we can learn more about the fantastic through its interaction with other modes or genres, so we must uncover gothic impulses and tropes in these same conglomerated forms. The notion of one identifiable form of the gothic in contemporary fiction is not only utopian, but also irrelevant, since a propensity for mixed genres and genre fragments is symptomatic of the composite nature of the postmodernist text.

Postmodernist Text and Context

The gothic's intersection with postmodernist forms and concepts provides a literary and theoretical context for the work of contemporary women writers who are themselves described as postmodernist, both in terms of an historical period in which they have been writing *and also* in terms of literary technique. Carter, Tennant, and Weldon do not write gothic novels; instead, their fiction includes fragments of the gothic which refer to disparate points along the generic spectrum, as well as expanding its parameters.

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[82] Flora Alexander perceives an interchange between these terms in the work of contemporary women's writing - "Fantasy, or magic realism, or contemporary Gothic, often overlapping in the work of the same author" - and understands the significance of this form generally as "a mode in which dreams, or metaphors, are employed to say something about social and historical or psychological realities." *Contemporary Women Novelists* (London & New York: Edward Arnold, 1989), p.61. Lorna Sage points to this same indistinction between the fantastic and realism as the central force in Carter's writing: "her fictional territory is so distinctive precisely because she has always refused to draw the boundaries that would allow her to be comfortably classified as *either* 'fantastic' or 'mainstream'. Sage, "Angela Carter Interview", *New Writing* (London: Minerva, 1992), pp.185-193 (p.191).

[83] Heilman, p.129; Breton cited in Northey, Margot, *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p.5; Cornwell, p.153.

Accordingly, it is important to look more closely at this idea of the fragment of genre. Generic hybridity and generic fragmentation in literature of the contemporary period are part of a particularly postmodernist phenomenon.[84]

The large number of fictional repetitions and transgressions has meant that the "shapes of Gothic and post-Gothic prose evolved over the century", as the shapes of the fantastic grew and fractured and a tradition of synthesized novels became established.[85] While the fantastic is "still recognizably present in its various postmodernist transformations",[86] it is no longer the province of formally fantastic literature, but has been disseminated throughout different kinds of literature. Thus, it is possible, through a postmodernist reading, to find an inverted gothic motif, reading, for instance, "the penetration of someone else's domestic space...[as] a displaced version of the gothic motif of haunting".[87]

Recognising that fiction made up of fragments of genres is characteristic of postmodernist writing, Cornwell suggests that postmodernist works "diversify and permutate the number of genre ingredients utilised".[88] The "portmanteau novel", a text reflecting the cross-fertilisation of these different genres, has five primary characteristics: (1) Unstable or exaggerated chronotope, (2) use of romantic irony, especially towards the past, (3) parody of multiple conventions, (4) intertextuality, and (5) the self-consciousness in fictional narrative known as 'metafiction'.[89] All of these features are germane to novels written by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon,[90] and all can be related

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[84] Hume notes the appropriation of gothic 'trappings' by other forms of literature as early as the late eighteenth century, while *hybrid* formations of the gothic are generally considered to be a more recent development in the history of the genre. Hume, p.283.

[85] Cornwell, p.107. Cornwell agrees with Brian McHale's approach to "the postmodernist fantastic" as a synthesis of varied forms, citing McHale's characterisation of the affinity between postmodernist fiction and the fantastic genre as "a zone of hesitation". Cornwell, p.151.

[86] McHale, p.80.

[87] McHale, p.82. McHale makes this point in his reading of William Gass' short fiction.

[88] Cornwell, p.154.

[89] Cornwell uses the term "portmanteau novel" interchangeably with "postmodern novel", but his basic meaning remains consistent in that he demonstrates the dominance of the multi-layered novel in the second half of the twentieth century.

[90] Cornwell does actually name Angela Carter amongst the writers of the portmanteau novel.

to the writers' treatment of the gothic.

As well as specific literary strategies, postmodernist theories have influenced, and been addressed in, their writing. For example, what we accept as 'the real' is questioned by the fantastic, and thereby hints at an important tenet of postmodernism, as Jackson makes clear: "The issue of the narrative's internal reality is always relevant to the fantastic, with the result that the 'real' is a notion which is under constant interrogation," to the extent that "the fantastic moves towards a dismantling of the 'real'".[91] The problematising of the real, in making the 'real' appear 'unreal', is part of the narrrative thrust of the postmodernist text. Their similar perception of the 'real' *as* gothic, discussed earlier, drives Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's intervention into both the postmodern and the gothic.

The challenge to the nature of the real has important ramifications for feminist fiction, because in this context, social reality may be regarded as a fictional contruct. Appropriately, T.E. Apter has pointed out that the fantastic "highlights the instability, inconsistency or underlying preposterousness of the normal."[92] As postmodern literature turns away from realism via the fantastic and the carnivalesque, we arrive at a 'fantastic realism' which can make the real appear fantastic. Confronted by this literature, we learn to read "in a fantastic key".[93] To read in this way is again significant to feminist literary criticism, since frequently the two methodologies coincide, particularly as the fantastic contains a "strong social, political and ethical thrust".[94] Jackson also highlights the dissident aims of the literary fantastic: the mode

> subverts dominant philosophical assumptions which uphold as 'reality' a coherent, single-viewed entity, that narrow vision which Bakhtin termed 'monological'.[95]

The postmodernist fantastic and the feminist in literature both reject any

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[91] Jackson, pp.36, 175.

[92] T. E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1982) p.211. Also cited in Cornwell, p.217.

[93] Vittorio Strada, *Symbols and Stories* (Venice: Marsilio, 1988) quoted in Cornwell, p.217.

[94] Cornwell, p.211.

[95] Jackson, p.48. A poststructuralist viewpoint, her argument here is grounded in Bakhtin's distinction between the 'monologic' and the 'dialogic'. See *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981 [1975]).

"single view" previously normalised as "reality". Accordingly, traces of the modern gothic in contemporary feminist fiction also work against the "monological" viewpoint.

Many literary fantastic texts meet Brian McHale's terms of "ontological preoccupation", central to the definitions of the postmodern.[96] Todorov believes that the fantastic "charge" has been absorbed into contemporary writing in general, and that *all* writing is now "hesitant". However, McHale argues against Todorov's assertion that the fantastic mode has been lost in this process of proliferation, suggesting that,

> in the context of postmodernism the fantastic has been co-opted as one of a number of strategies of an ontological poetics that pluralizes the 'real' and thus problematizes representation.[97]

The narrative energy of the fantastic "charge" now contributes to the postmodernist project of questioning methods of representation. Moreover, the gothic is revealed as an appropriate form for such problematising of representation since this has been part of its structure from the beginning. For according to Vijay Mishra, gothic is the

> other of realism, its unconscious yearnings, its destabilising apparatus and, finally, an image of its own doubts about the unproblematic possibilities of representation.[98]

We can see how the nature of the gothic neatly coincides with postmodernist subversions of stable constructions of meaning, as the genre figures instability itself.

If critics of the traditional gothic novel speak of barriers between the individual psyche and the external world, stressing the epistemological interests of the developing genre, critics of the postmodernist novel point to a fantastic ontological structure whereby a novel presents orders of being separated by boundaries. When a collapse of world boundaries occurs in a novel it can be disruptive and catastrophic. Novels by Carter, Tennant, and

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[96] Cornwell, p.154.

[97] McHale, p.75.

[98] Mishra, Vijay, "The Gothic Sublime: theory, practice, and interpretation", DPhil dissertation (Oxford University, 1989), p.6. Where love and sexuality are generally depicted in positive terms according to a Western ethos, gothic writers are interested in the "underside" of these concepts: in incest and sexual violence. See Punter, p.411.

Weldon commonly carry gothic fragments along with the fantastic charge as part of their postmodernist character.

Cornwell's assertion that the portmanteau novel often incorporates postmodernist experimentation, brings us back to Kelly's argument that the gothic text in particular exhibits postmodernist tendencies in its own acts of transgression. An attraction to the quality of modernity, to the immediate 'newness' of everything, is the reason that we find the gothic's transgressive nature so compelling, argues Kelly. This attraction is also intrinsic to the postmodernist debate in general. Linda Hutcheon has argued that postmodernism is about the problematisation and questioning of historical knowledge.[99] Postmodernist fiction's revisionist approach to history means that the past can seem as new as the present, an effect created when feminist writers re-present history as myth. Carter and the others renew images of femininity through a revisionist practice, in which iconic figures from history, myth, and literature are 'embodied' in their texts. These figures themselves appear as cryptograms to be deciphered, and accord with Cornwell's summation that "the fantastic and its themes seem to be clear antecedents of both metafiction...and the trend toward literary games".[100]

The importance of placing the contemporary gothic in the context of postmodernist interpretation, and a reason that it has become less visible as a genre, can be found in Cornwell's argument that the 'dominant' in literature "has passed steadily from the old certainties of realism to the fragmented and ambiguous challenge posed by the literary fantastic".[101] Certain influences have helped to bring the fantastic to this position:

> In the age of modernism and postmodernism, and under progressive impact from ideas generated by psychoanalysis, existentialism and dialogism (Freud/dreams, Sartre/being, Bakhtin/carnival) the fantastic is becoming 'the dominant'.[102]

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[99] See *Poetics of Postmodernism*.

[100] Cornwell, p.143. Malcolm Bradbury also stresses this aspect of contemporary writing: the postmodernist text "becomes a game-like construct". Bradbury (ed), *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction* (London: Fontana, 1977), p.15.

[101] Cornwell, p.145. Cornwell uses Roman Jakobson's term, the 'dominant', to signify "the focussing point of a work of art".

[102] Cornwell, p.211.

Gothic fragments have been absorbed, then, as part of the broader 'literary fantastic', into the mainstream of serious literature. The postmodern gothic is somewhat occluded from critical view because, as part of the dominant mode, it cannot sustain the high profile held by the traditional gothic when the latter was perceived as distinct from the Romantic norm.

Images of the gothic appear faint, then, in contemporary literature; a ghostly persistence which Jameson characterises, locating the gothic amidst

> the *half-life* of the subliterary genres of mass culture, transformed into the drugstore and airport paperback lines of gothics, mysteries, romances, bestsellers.[103]

Here the genre is reduced to a form of pulp fiction, as Jameson disregards the more "literary" engagement with the gothic by writers like Carter, Banville, or Ballard (a confusion within the term gothic which also occurs in the "female gothic" distinctions between 'literary' and 'popular' writing). Indeed, Jameson's view of the gothic is not favourable, referring to it as "that boring and exhausted paradigm, the gothic".[104] Certainly, its exhausted quality is conspicuous in the device of pastiche (discussed in Chapter 4), but in their imaginative transformations of the gothic and reflections on a shared literary and cultural history, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon easily deflect the indictment that the gothic is "boring".

Jameson is right, however, to introduce the context of postmodern *culture* in his reference to the gothic. The three women writers were all influenced by the period in which they began writing; this is reflected in many of their themes and textual strategies: the incorporation of cinematic representations; an incredulity toward metanarratives;[105] and what

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[103] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1993 [1981]), p.107, emphasis added.

[104] Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Captialism* (London & New York: Verso, 1991), p.289.

[105] See Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). According to Lyotard, "[i]n contemporary society and culture - postindustrial society, postmodern culture - the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility." P.37.

Barthelme calls the ability to "tolerate the anxiety"[106] - an anxiety clearly bound up with a perception of the late twentieth century as the nuclear age and with millennial narratives of apocalypse. The inclusion of diverse material often lends a specific character to their fiction; as Scott Lash has suggested, postmodernism "can pose a greater threat to social and cultural order than modernism has done, because it pervades both high and popular culture".[107] The components which finally combine to make their treatment of the gothic worth exploring become clear within this postmodern rubric. The political impetus of their feminism and a delight in both high and low cultural references are also imbricated with a sophisticated understanding of the gothic. For Carter, Tennant, and Weldon share one of the quintessential aspects of postmodern writing in general: "the apparent collapse of criticism into its object, the much-discussed blurring of the 'critical' and 'creative' functions."[108]

## III. Evolutions of Genre

In the work of two theorists of genre, Alastair Fowler and Fredric Jameson, we find further grounding for a working model of the term 'gothic' that illuminates the form of the genre in contemporary fiction, as their work traces generic history in order to explain the shifts in meaning and scope that have occurred within several genres. A synthesis of these two positions can then be applied to a reading of the contemporary use of the term gothic.

### The Tertiary Phase and Subgenres

Providing a useful model for present purposes as it maps the continual differentiation of genre type in literature, Fowler adopts C.S. Lewis' distinction between the primary phase (as originary) and the secondary phase (as literary refinement) from the latter's analysis of genre development. This two-part

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[106] Quoted by McHale, "Some Postmodernist Stories" in D'haen, Theo and Hans Bertens (eds), *Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp.13-25 (p.16).

[107] Lash, Scott, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p.14.

[108] Connor, Steve, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990 [1989]), p.201.

model is then updated by Fowler to accommodate stylistic experimentation which is not adequately defined within the considerable range of Lewis' 'secondary phase'. A third term is possible, he suggests, whereby the writer employs a genre already in its secondary form but as a conscious gesture of innovation: "The tertiary form may be a symbolic reinterpretation of the secondary."[109] Such reworking is seen to be 'symbolic' because of the requisition of established generic properties without attention to the original generic content or its extraliterary influences.

An emphasis on the creative literary interpretation of genre is clear as Fowler marks an historical shift in the writer's interest in genre, here using the gothic to illustrate his point. At its earliest stage, the gothic was written to frighten the reader, the mechanics of the haunted house plot applied to visceral effect. The "second wave" of gothic writers (Poe, for example) in the early nineteenth century both enlarged the scope of the genre and suggested possible avenues of interpretation. The "tertiary phase" is located in the work of Stevenson and James in the Victorian period, when Fowler characterises the gothic as "an old mystery to be demythologized".[110] The perception of the gothic as material to be demythologised is a view which has persisted into the present century. Jackson's parallel view of the modern fantastic as an "inverted form of myth" points to the way in which the gothic is able to expose myth by injecting it with a realistic interpretation. This operation is central to Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's writing, whereby other literary forms such as the fairytale are overlaid on the gothic as a means of emphasising their mythic status, in this case through common tropes such as the "lost" heroines of gothic and fairy tale, and then both forms are subsequently subverted through a feminist revisionary practice. In order to emphasise their subsequent subversion of particular myths or genres, the writers frequently align similar or related myths to underline their structure.

It is only in the period of the "tertiary phase", Fowler argues, that gothic "shows much awareness of sociopolitical meaning". When Kafka locates a

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[109] Fowler, Alastair, *Kinds of Literature*, p.162.

[110] Fowler, p.163.

"political sense in the gothic apparatus itself", it is possible to extrapolate from this that a mutually reflective relationship can be discerned between the gothic and the real, since an awareness of the real is inherent to the genre.[111] The corollary to this view may be its antithesis: that in fact there is nothing more gothic than reality itself, as Jarrett has proposed. This tertiary stage is well illustrated in the texts discussed in the following chapters, for in its postmodern aspect the gothic has been employed by writers to explore cultural and political issues of the late twentieth century, while these concerns have also been located by critics as already within its own configurations. In making the socio-political content of the gothic apparatus explicit, the feminist uses of the gothic too have contributed to the continuous development of the literary "kind". Thus there seems to be a convergence of critical and fictional interpretations of the genre.

Fowler's taxonomy of literary kinds rests on a telescopic model of ever-decreasing specificity. The "kind" is the strongest term here, as it delineates a category of literature which is widely recognisable and begets a tradition of literary composition. The subgenre and mode develop from the originary kind in distinctive ways. While the mode may project an "incomplete repertoire" of generic features, the subgenre introduces innovatory applications of such features and may even expand the generic parameters to the extent that it becomes recognised as a kind in its own right.[112] Feminist interventions in the gothic may be characterised as both a kind and a mode, in that they develop the genre through innovation, but cannot be restricted, as we will see in the next chapter on "female gothic", to strict and self-distinct categories.

Just as qualifying terms are applied to indicate specific uses of the fantastic and the realistic, many composite terms are now in circulation which define the gothic by harnessing it to a very specific design or interpretation. The "domestic gothic", for instance, exchanges romantic images and supernatural themes for a more personalised and realistic gothic treatment. In its contemporary incarnation the gothic novel has been further delineated

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[111] Fowler, p.163.

[112] Fowler, p.107.

in the manner of subgenres in relation to sexual politics: the "Female Gothic" and the "Homosexual Gothic";[113] in relation to geographical region: the Canadian gothic, the southern American gothic, and the Western gothic; and expressing cultural and political perspectives: the postcolonial gothic. Such divisions frequently coincide in the scope of their thematic material (indeed we might term all gothic fiction "domestic" in its claustrophobic and familial focus), yet generally the introduction of these labels signals the emphasis of their particular interest in, and use of, the generic conventions of the gothic, as much as in their broader cultural and literary agendas.

These subgenres frequently assimilate elements belonging to other traditions, as in the case of the "American Frontier gothic" which is

> not so much a distinct literary tradition as it is a matrix of symbolism evoking a special atmosphere of anguish, often incorporated into literary structures whose overall character cannot be described as gothic.[114]

The description of this particular evolution of the gothic coincides with its contemporary use by women writers, since it is precisely a "matrix of symbolism" which figures a gothic inheritance in their writing. Although the 'spectrum' of gothic threatens to become too nebulous to convey any distinct generic identity whatsoever (thus the term "North American Gothic", intended to highlight common ground between the genre's incarnations in Canada and the United States, may instead elide their individual differences[115]), the choice of a shared vocabulary of images, perceptible in fiction by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, urges a reading attentive to their collective identity.

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[113] Stephen Adams claims that "in the public mind, homosexuality itself is essentially 'gothic' - a question of violated taboos, dark secrets, guilts and fears." *The Homosexual as Hero in Contemporary Fiction* (London: Vision Press, 1980), p.57. See his chapter entitled, "Gothic Love: Truman Capote, Carson McCullers and James Purdy", pp.56-82. Sedgwick has also argued that we must recognise "the Gothic novel as an important locus for the working-out of some of the terms by which nineteenth- and twentieth-century European culture has used homophobia to divide and manipulate the male-homosocial spectrum"; the gothic essentially stands as an arena for what this culture perceives as "perverse". See *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), especially "Toward the Gothic: Terrorism and Homosexual Panic", pp.83-96 (p.90).

[114] Mogen, David, "Frontier Myth and American Gothic", *Genre* XIV (Fall, 1981), pp.329-346 (p.345). Mogen suggests that Brockden Brown was the earliest American writer to combine the subject matter of the Frontier with the literary gothic.

[115] Mogen, p.344. See Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*.

While the nomenclature applied to generic forms is often contrived by critical activity,[116] in addition to this cross-fertilisation between texts and their criticism, Fowler acknowledges that new forms of genre result primarily from contemporary cultural influences on literary activity. Therefore, to assess both the impact of a matrix of cultural symbolism on contemporary women writers using the gothic, and how this leads to transformations of the genre, we must bring together Jameson's account of genre with its historical and cultural foundations *and* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's interpretive practice of reading textual surfaces.

Jameson and the Sediments of Genre

In his introduction to *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson presents his methodology as explicitly Marxist in his use of the dialectic to negotiate a kind of synthesis of the traditionally estranged critical positions of theory and literary history. This dialectical method permits the equal recognition of these two principal approaches to literary texts. While Fowler too cites the enormous impact of cultural context on literary production and on the critical diagnosis of generic form, Jameson engages more fully with literary and cultural postmodernism and particularly with the ideology of form. Jameson's approach provides an appealing solution to the apparent incompatability of structuralist and socio-historicist critical practices. He balances the obvious importance of both form and content in the reading of a narrative by proposing the critical fulcrum of historical materialism. Jameson's theoretical position is in fact suitable to the present project because its Marxism encompasses structuralism, poststructuralism, and feminism - and so is able to accommodate the range of fictional manifestations of the gothic uncovered by these readings. It is also possible to detect the influence of all of these theoretical positions in Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's fiction. (It is worth recording that whereas Derrida uncovers in interpretive discourses a will to "totalize", Jameson likewise admonishes these discourses for certain "'strategies of containment' whereby they are able to project the illusion that

[116] Jameson has suggested that older generic specifications have resulted in what he calls a "brand-name" usage of terms. *The Political Unconscious*, p.107.

their readings are somehow complete and self-sufficient".[117])

Jameson insists on the problematising of categories which are traditionally applied to narratives. He identifies the two principal concepts of genre as (a) the syntactic, which is fundamental to a structuralist reading and is seen to adhere most closely to the laws of genre or "kind", and (b) the semantic, which responds to the interpretive method of literary analysis and also reflects the characteristics of the modal. These two methods of genre criticism are historicised and thereby converge in Jameson's project of a "dialectical use of generic literary history".[118]

In adopting the syntactic approach, we might find that the structures and character types of the eighteenth-century gothic persist in the modern period, albeit embodied in imaginative re-incarnations. The trope of confinement and escape, for instance, appears in contemporary context and plot - such as the Magic Toyshop of Angela Carter's novel or the remote quarry in Tennant's *Queen of Stones*. The semantic approach, however, yields more subtle patterns of literary change which is crucial to a reading of the modern gothic. For the aim of the modal approach to genre, originally espoused by Frye, is an identification of the 'spirit' or 'vision' embedded within a genre. In the present discussion this concept of the 'spirit' is quite significant, as the identification of the term gothic often seems to operate on an instinctive level. When book reviewers acclaim Margaret Atwood's latest novel as another "Canadian Gothic", for example, do they or their readers have a clear understanding of what that might describe? Often such a reference relies on a "sense" with which a novel seems infused. Yet, Jameson's development of Frye's model involves the discovery in this 'spirit' of what he calls an 'ideologeme', that is,

a historically determinate conceptual or semic complex which

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[117] Jameson, p.10. It is also true that some of Jameson's critics read his work as reproducing this totalizing tendency. Douglas Kellner, for example, points to the work of Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Foucault which "challenge Marxian presuppositions, theories, and politics by claiming that in addition to being obsolete, Marxist theories are reductive or even 'totalitarian'". Kellner, Douglas (ed), *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique* (Washington: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), p.3. Jameson's approach nevertheless provides one of the most flexible and multivalent readings of genre in recent times.

[118] Jameson, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious*, p.109.

> can project itself variously in the form of a 'value system' or 'philosophical concept'.[119]

This 'spirit' which Jameson theorises is reminiscent of Punter's "gesture of defiance": an impulse persistent in the genre since the eighteenth century which Punter regards as the fundamental characteristic of the gothic. Jameson casts this characteristic into a specific statement about the way we read texts and genre. Any "values" belonging to a text will also be perceived "variously": the ideologeme may change according to our own historical vantage point, while the possibility of ideological expression or content is always present in the work.

While Fowler comments on the significance of extra-literary factors in the development and criticism of genres, Jameson's thesis does not argue for a straightforward socio-cultural contextualisation of the same. Indeed, this is where the difficulty arises in the application of his critical programme, since the identification of this 'ideologeme' is not simply a matter of locating themes or tropes in a text which reflect the cultural moment of its production. Rather Jameson intends the creation or retrieval of "a prior historical or ideological *subtext*...[which] must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact" in a literary work.[120] We might understand this as an equation in which a critical interpretation of genre within a literary text intervenes between that text and its antecedents. Jameson is as much concerned then with the act of interpretation as he is with literature, and hence his theory of genre stands as a useful model with which to consider the many different interpretations of the gothic we have briefly surveyed. At a time when writers demonstrate an acute awareness of their own reading and writing of both cultural and literary codes, his assertion that "texts come before us as the always-already-read",[121] that there is a significant impact on genre by interpretive ideas themselves, seems particularly auspicious.

Jameson acknowledges the usefulness for genre history of the term "genealogy", as Fowler does, but prefers in the end Husserl's "sedimentation".

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[119] Jameson, p.115.

[120] Jameson, p.81.

[121] Jameson, p.9.

This is an apt metaphor for the apparent transformation of genre, as it recognises that genre bears a socio-symbolic message, and one which remains relevant for the reading of genres in the present:

> The ideology of the form itself, thus sedimented, persists into the later, more complex structure as a generic message which coexists...with elements from later stages.[122]

Thus, the legacy of generic transformation becomes more visible in the multi-layered text where formal traces of the gothic have accumulated. My intention is to adopt Jameson's exhortation to "project a model of the coexistence or tension between several generic modes or strands".[123] Central to an exploration of gothic elements in contemporary women's writing is an examination of the ways in which the original generic message and its ideological subtext might reoccur in the present form and be in tension with the later developments of that genre. We will see how Weldon's invocation of the Frankenstein myth in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* comments on late twentieth-century possibilities of the reconstruction of women's bodies; socio-political discourses on the association of disgust and the female body, as well as Romantic desire, can in turn be read back into the earlier text. Similarly, in Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* revisions of the fairy tale are ostentatiously post-Freudian; her reading of the story of Bluebeard makes explicit a Freudian and feminist interpretation of the sexuality of the entrapped heroine which is presented in a self-consciously post-modern language. In this collection of stories, Carter both collaborates with critical investigations of the ideology of the fairytale and enacts Punter's argument that the narratives of psychoanalysis share the themes and structures of gothic fiction.[124] Jameson insists on the impact of twentieth-century philosophies of the

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[122] Jameson, p.141.

[123] Jameson, p.141.

[124] For reassessments of the fairy tale through cultural, psychoanalytic, and feminist readings, see Rowe, Karen, "Feminism and Fairy Tales", *Women's Studies*, 6 (New York, 1979); Bottigheimer, Ruth, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Dundes, Alan, "The Psychoanalytic Study of the Grimms' Tales with Special Reference to 'The Maiden Without Hands'", *The Germanic Review* (New York: Columbia University, 1987); Zipes, Jack, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (London: Heineman, 1979). As we saw earlier, Punter suggests that similar pleasure may be derived from both psychological case studies and gothic fiction. See Punter, in Graham, pp.1-10.

subject, such as psychoanalysis; it is our moment in the history of ideas as well as the socio-cultural context which is crucial to any reading of a contemporary gothic.

This relationship between the contemporary and the traditional - or rather the incorporation of the present with the past - is fundamental to Jameson's thesis, and to an understanding of a term like "contemporary gothic". The methodology of a cultural materialist study of literature is expressed initially in terms of the 'synchronic': the examination of an individual period which reveals an underlying total system or idealistic concept. The 'diachronic' embraces a series of such periods and affords a critical vista from which the synchronic, and particularly the present, can be clearly outlined, as well as the harmonising and contradictory effects which are discernible over time.

An intertextual approach to genre is therefore included in Jameson's understanding of the diachronic, while Fowler also comments on this characteristic, pointing to "implicit indicators of gothic (wild weather; a castellar *mise-en-scène*)" and explicit mention of, and allusion to, gothic texts.[125] A gothic heritage is repeatedly and self-consciously employed in the novels of the women writers to be considered, both acknowledging the genre's history and creating innovations of the form.

Many studies of the gothic have commented constructively on the formal characteristics of the genre, as we have seen. In adopting Jameson's project of a

> coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life,[126]

a significant extension of gothic criticism is made possible, as well as an informed reading of the gothic in contemporary feminist fiction. As Jameson makes clear, this should not result in the redundancy of the formalist position nor in the use of a socio-cultural reading as merely supplementary. Instead,

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[125] Fowler, p.90, discussing *The Turn of the Screw* which makes references to both *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Jane Eyre*.

[126] Jameson, p.105.

his crucial contribution to genre theory is the interactive relationship between ideology and form; here, socio-cultural meaning resides in the formal. It is possible to show that both the gothic genre and its criticism carry with them the value systems of previous historical periods. Some recent critical work on the gothic has focussed on the genre's origins in the decade of the French Revolution and the implications of its philosophical, political, and cultural values for the writing of fiction at that time.[127]

Consequently, the coordinating 'third term' which Jameson positions in relation to the formal and the social - and the syntactic and semantic traditions - is History itself. For him, this term includes:

> conjunctures of social class, the historicity of structures of feeling and perception and ultimately of bodily experience, the constitution of the psyche and subject, and the dynamics and specific temporal rhythms of historicity.[128]

If we read through the sites of the gothic in the novels to be discussed, it is possible to read the first three aspects of this term back into the texts themselves. Issues of class deferred by primary themes of gender, a contemporary perception of the gothic body in relation to the one discovered in earlier gothic literature, and most significantly the impact of theories of the subject on the composition of contemporary writing, these are the factors which are to be detected in the contemporary gothic, and which for Jameson, constitute the reading of History back into the text.

Where a narrative approaches an estimation of real social conditions, Jameson finds that "historical reality must rather be disguised and defused by the sense of moonlit revels dissolving into thin air",[129] apropos the Romantic text which enacts this formula. At the risk of simplifying his conclusion about "magical narratives" then, we can say that Jameson finds that romance turns reality into the fantastic. And reversing this progression reveals the operation which drives a cultural materialist reading: to reinsert

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[127] See Paulson, Roland, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[128] Jameson, p.147.

[129] Jameson, p.149.

history or reality back into the text and thereby to decode its ideologeme. An examination of the fantastic written by women in Chapter 2, and then exemplified in following chapters, will argue a similar case: that frequently reality is revealed in their work as gothic in itself and this is imparted by a fantastic text. Jameson's model subsequently reconstitutes the presence of 'the real' in such texts, which may at first appear to exist in a rarified literary sphere remote from any social or political meaning.

Finally then we can see how Jameson's work on genre can ground a consideration of the nature of the gothic in contemporary British women's writing. Thus, the 'history of forms' of the gothic read in conjunction with 'evolutions of social life' which are relevant to women in particular will provide the framework for a discussion of possible gothic aspects of the work of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon. While this chapter has concentrated on one half of this diachronic equation - the history of forms - the next will address issues in women's writing which should be read in the history of socio-cultural and political experience.

## IV. Sedgwick and the Poetics of Surfaces

Having considered several means of identifying the gothic in contemporary literature - within the history of the gothic, as part of the fantastic mode of writing predominant in the current period, and bound up with postmodernist concerns and practices - an important development in gothic criticism remains to be addressed, one which underpins the approach to the gothic adopted by this thesis. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal essay, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel", marks a significant departure from the hermeneutic practices of gothic studies in general. These practices may be exemplified by Heilman's discussion of Charlotte Brontë's revision of the genre, in which he argues that Brontë's work demonstrated a "flight from the ordinary rational surface of things against which the old Gothic was the first rebel in fiction".[130] Heilman hereby

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[130] Heilman, Robert B., "Charlotte Brontë's 'New' Gothic" in Rathburn, Robert C. and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (eds), *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p.127.

unwittingly points to the gothic's incitement of a 'depth' reading - drawing us to look behind its fictional curtain, to the extent that we no longer notice the appearance of the curtain itself.

Sedgwick's work identifies the methodological shortcomings of such an approach to the gothic, in which a recourse to

> the thematics of depth and then to a psychology of depth has left unexplored the most characteristic and daring areas of Gothic convention, those that point the reader's attention back to surfaces.[131]

As a genre which insists on secrets, dark spaces, and the constant threat of the return of the repressed, the gothic invites a reading itself based on a model which can readily accommodate such configurations. Naturalised as the 'common sense' way of reading, this depth hermeneutics is challenged by a critic who is more interested in the material normally overlooked in gothic texts.[132] As Karen Swann points out, Sedgwick counteracts the tendency to essentialise a text as "just" a gothic tale of terror, reducible to specific components through the disclosure of its deep structures,[133] and instead suggests alternative angles from which to explore the gothic text. A reintroduction of appearances, of the textual surface, into the reading equation proves vital to an understanding of a contemporary use of the gothic.[134] For a poetics of the surface is immediately relevant both to theoretical accounts of the gothic as well as to narrative techniques in postmodernist fiction. The present study contends that meanings of the gothic

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[131] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel", *PMLA* 96 (March, 1981), pp.255-270 (p.255).

[132] It is possible that a novel both highlights and participates in a tension between two modes of reading, a tension created through a discernible contradiction: "a novel [may] complain against the commonsense way we read it, though that is the kind of reading it seems also to solicit by appearing to respect the proprieties and to aim at 'clearness and effect'." See Kermode, Frank, "Secrets and Narrative Sequence", *Critical Inquiry* 7 (Autumn, 1980), pp.83-101 (p.101).

[133] Swann, Karen, "Literary Gentlemen and Lovely Ladies: The Debate on the Character of *Christabel*" in Chase, Cynthia (ed), *Romanticism* (London & New York: Longman, 1993), pp.140-161 (p.160, n.11).

[134] The term "surface" is obviously problematic. We are accustomed to conceptualising any *meaning* as depth. My use of the word is allied to the notion that what appears to function as decoration in the text may have meaning which is directly relevant to a contemporary understanding of the gothic as "textual", as opposed to contributing to a presentation of a complex character as such. This will become clear in the following chapter when we look at the field of iconography.

can be read across the surfaces of the female figures in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon featured in the following chapters. Although Sedgwick herself is primarily concerned with psychoanalytic concepts such as hysteria and paranoia, the central strategy of her theory will prove useful for the purposes of this exploration of the contemporary gothic, because, as poststructuralist theory is concerned with surfaces, so the treatment of the gothic in contemporary fiction in turn reflects this shift in our cultural interpretive practices.

Sedgwick's project sets out "to show that the major Gothic conventions are coherent in terms that do not depend on that psychological model" - that is, the spatial metaphor of depth as representative of the individual self.[135] Her work encompasses two theoretical areas which are of central importance in reading the tropes featured in the following chapters: she brings together a poststructuralist reading practice and a reevaluation of the dominant form of gothic criticism. Just as Jameson devises a reconfiguration of genre according to a late Marxist conception of literary structures, Sedgwick was clearly influenced by certain poststructuralist ideas and subsequently invested these in her perception of gothic literature's *modus operandi*.[136] Accordingly she follows one of the fundamental tenets of poststructuralist theory, that

> the havoc interpretation wreaks in the domain of appearances is incalculable, and its privileged quest for hidden meanings may be profoundly mistaken.[137]

To attend to this mistake through the recognition of an alternative means of interpretation does not, however, necessitate the complete abandonment of the

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[135] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York & London: Methuen, 1986), p.12.

[136] It is interesting to note that Sedgwick acknowledges neither Baudrillard nor Bachelard as influences, yet her work is openly indebted to Lacan. However, the work of other (French) writers was in circulation at the time that Sedgwick was first proposing this critical revision. The suspicion of a depth hermeneutics exemplifies the poststructuralist challenge to traditional, "common sense" notions of interpretation and theories that insist on penetrating what is manifest in order to discover what is latent. Instead the notion of textual allurement whereby the reader is "seduced" by the surface of a text is, according to Baudrillard, central to the operation of language itself; he writes, "[d]espite all efforts to uncover it, to betray it, to make it signify, language returns to its secret seduction." Baudrillard, Jean, "On Seduction" in Poster, Mark (ed) *Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988 [essay 1979]), p.160.

[137] Baudrillard, in Poster, p.149.

structuralist agenda; there is no question of definitively choosing between a practice of explication grounded in the search for 'truth', 'presence', and origins, on the one hand, and one which affirms a sense of play beyond the "dream of full presence" espoused by humanist metaphysics, on the other.[138]

Employing a deconstructive move to illustrate that the symmetry of the inside-outside relation is undermined in gothic texts, Sedgwick does not dismiss the meanings which adhere to these respective positions of inside and outside, but rather problematises their association as hierarchical or fixed. We have seen in section I how dependent gothic criticism in general has been on the inside/outside construction, a model based on specific cultural perceptions of what is figured by each sphere. However, if we follow Gaston Bachelard and his claim that "the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances" and can no longer be regarded as reciprocal entities,[139] it soon becomes necessary to focus our attention on the plane which lies between these two fields. As Judith Butler points out,

> 'inner' and 'outer' constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject. When that subject is challenged, the meaning and necessity of those terms are subject to displacement.[140]

Evaluations of these binary terms inevitably draw attention to the constant re-negotiation of the intermediate site: the surface. Thus, in order to grasp the various cultural and theoretical meanings which momentarily fix themselves to the surface, amidst shifting definitions and displacements, our attention will turn to the visual symbolism associated with the bodies of fictional

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[138] See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), p.293. Derrida, discussing models of interpretation employed in the discourse of anthropology, argues that "these two interpretations [structuralist and poststructuralist] of interpretation - which are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously and reconcile them in an obscure economy - together share the field of the social sciences".

[139] Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994 [Eng. trans. 1964]), p.216. Bachelard here advocates devising "more concrete, more phenomenologically exact inceptions" to replace what he regards as the inadequate or incomplete spatial model of inside/outside.

[140] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990), p.134. Butler investigates the implications of this deconstruction for gender identity, whereby gender may be only the "truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity", p.136.

characters in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon.

Another precedent to Sedgwick's theory is Jean Baudrillard's estimation of the structure of discursive language, which illustrates how gothic criticism is not unique in its pursuit of hidden meaning: "*Every interpretive discourse*", claims Baudrillard, "... *wants to get beyond appearances*; this is its illusion and fraud."[141] Indeed, interpretive discourses such as philosophy and psychology even reproduce gothic narratives in their accounts of subjectivity; Bachelard, for example, inquires, "Is there one of us who hasn't in his memories a Bluebeard chamber that should not have been opened, even half-way?"[142] As a corrective to the traditional method of approaching a text as if it were a gothic labyrinth with hidden rooms, Sedgwick similarly reinvests appearances in a literary text with meaning previously regarded as secondary.

Sedgwick's reading of nineteenth-century gothic literature is particularly important for understanding the operation of the gothic in much contemporary fiction. Her work in fact highlights a distinct change in the function of gothic tropes themselves, a change which Heilman identifies:

> the symbolic also modifies the Gothic, for it demands of the reader a more mature and complicated response than the relatively simple thrill or momentary intensity of feeling sought by primitive Gothic.[143]

This revised stance toward the symbolic, or the metaphoric, exhibited by some new gothic fiction, is in accordance with the kind of reading which Sedgwick advocates. When Bachelard writes that "[e]ach metaphor must be restored to its surface nature; it must be brought up out of habit of expression to actuality of expression",[144] this attention to the symbolic is shown to be a consequence of the poststructuralist revision of the depth hermeneutic. Applied to the contemporary gothic, therefore, this poststructuralist reading accounts for, and highlights, the close attention to the symbolic, the reanimation of metaphor so evident in the work of Carter, Tennant, and

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[141] Baudrillard, "On Seduction", p.150.

[142] Bachelard, p.224.

[143] Heilman, p.120.

[144] Bachelard, pp.221-222.

Weldon, where it proves to be a specifically feminist strategy.

Her theoretical approach is further suited to a consideration of contemporary women's writing in its understanding of character portrayal. Sedgwick views bodily markings such as flesh and blood as "referential"; they act in a manner comparable to language itself. If character is directly linked to these inscriptions, and often conferred through a metonymic process, as Sedgwick suggests, then her conclusion that this reveals character to be relational and performative, is precisely an area of inquiry which these writers explore.[145]

However my interest in this model is not in the construction of fictional character *per se* but rather its contribution to a focus on the symbolic - in particular the textual shapes inhabited by the female body. The context for this embodiment - in the 'female' gothic and in the literary fantastic - is the subject of the following chapter. The combination of Sedgwick's reading practice and Jameson's theory of generic structure provides a framework for interpreting contemporary gothic fiction against the broad, complex areas of the postmodernist fantastic and the gothic tradition as a whole.

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[145] The performative and symbolic coincide here in identity as mimicry of female cultural stereotypes. This is a crucial perspective for a feminist text which would argue against an "original" female identity. See Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*. Issues of performance are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

# CHAPTER TWO

## 'FEMALE' GOTHIC AND CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S FICTION

I see your voice
Black and leafy, as in my childhood,

A yew hedge of orders,
Gothic and barbarous
- "Little Fugue", ll.23-26

The depiction of a gothic memory in Plath's poem, "Little Fugue", provides clues to the kind of imagery prevalent in the contemporary gothic written by women. Themes of childhood, the threat posed by a father/lover figure, and an ambivalent response to the genre's patriarchal configurations - "a yew hedge of orders", perhaps - are amongst those which reappear in the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon. These writers approach the genre via Plath's distinctive intervention in the gothic; her vision of the genre seems to haunt their writing. Not only does her work connect the three novelists, historically and thematically, to an entire tradition of the "female gothic", but her imagery of the body also informs their own representations of the female figure. Thus, an overview of the critical definitions of the *female* gothic is vital to an understanding of how we can refer to aspects within the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon as gothic.

The work of contemporary women writers engages with the two areas of literary tradition surveyed in the preceding chapter - the gothic and the fantastic - and accordingly belongs to categories distinguished as the "female gothic" and the "female fantastic". Yet their presentations of the female figure, like Plath's, require a distinction to be made between a "female" and a "feminist" gothic, as this chapter will argue. The interpretive models of Jameson and Sedgwick, discussed in the last chapter, allow us to read the iconography of this female figure in terms of both the gothic *and* a feminist

poetics. Before looking at three specific figures to see how they focus the interests of the feminist gothic (the subject of Chapters 3, 4, and 5), our attention will move from the generic context of this figurative embodiment - the female gothic - to the ways in which Carter, Tennant, and Weldon implicate the gothic in a reading of the female body as text.

## I. The Female Gothic

When she first devised the adjunct term of "female gothic", Ellen Moers understood it to mean "the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic".[1] Moers' instrumental study thus positions Ann Radcliffe's novels at the beginning of a genealogical tradition of 'female gothic' writing, and extends her account as far as Plath.[2] Since many of the themes which Moers discusses remain relevant to, and evident in, the work of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, it is my intention to develop her thesis in order to ascertain how far her formulation of the genre can be applied to contemporary fiction written by British women, before identifying ways in which such fiction exceeds Moers' conclusions in its manipulation and innovation of gothic tropes. Many elements of Moers' description of the genre have been echoed by other critics seeking to consolidate a sense of a female tradition of the gothic, and some of these aspects also overlap with those of the 'main' tradition. What follows will be a survey of the critical studies concerned with the notion of a 'female gothic', in order to consider the common themes which emerge from this review and the relevance of these to contemporary writing.

An examination of the principal means of identifying the female gothic will show that a greater distinction should be made between women-authored novels which might be described as gothic and configurations of the gothic employed for specifically feminist purposes. It is clear from the many different definitions offered for the gothic, which we observed in the preceding chapter,

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[1] Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women*, p.90.

[2] Amongst the few who have written about Plath in relation to the gothic, Victor Sage has discussed her later poems and their complex relation to the genre of Christian confessional autobiography and to the imagery of the Catholic body. See Sage, *Horror Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp.115-22.

that the genre has evolved into such a varied spectrum of literary practices that it is not possible to conceive of 'female' gothic as simply writing against the grain of some stable, identifiable genre. As we shall see, the easy division of the gothic genre into 'male gothic' as written by men and 'female gothic' as written by women cannot fully address the complexities of contemporary gothic writing.

Moreoever, the concept of an exclusively female tradition of writing is problematic in itself. Arguing against the restrictions this concept erects, Rita Felski has identified the inadequacies inherent to the notion of an

> autonomous women's literature grounded in authentic female experience and its consequent *inability* to account for ideological and intertextual determinants of both subjectivity and textual meaning.[3]

Certainly for a writer like Carter, a feminist aesthetic necessarily and inevitably engages with the cultural matrix largely determined by a patriarchal ideology, and reflects women's participation in this system as well as their resistance to it. While this thesis demonstrates that some common material can be uncovered in novels written by women of the same generation, and that this incorporates the self-conscious invocation of the work of their female (gothic) predecessors, this is proposed in tandem with an acknowledgment of their intercession in a broader cultural politics which cannot be divorced from male-authored texts or images.[4]

Furthermore, the gender of a writer does not guarantee the presence or lack of a *feminist* viewpoint, even when we look back to examples of the gothic in the last century. The nineteenth-century English novel in general, it has

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[3] Felski, Rita, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.50, emphasis added.

[4] The type of criticism which Moers employs has been termed "gynocriticism" by Elaine Showalter. This dominant mode of Anglo-American criticism is concerned with the specificity of women's writing, a tradition of women authors and an exploration of women's culture. See Showalter, "Toward a Feminist Aesthetics", in *New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (London: Virago Press, 1986). For a concise account of the differences between this strain of feminist criticism and the poststructuralist-oriented French feminist practice known as "gynesis", see Mary Eagleton's Introduction to her *Feminist Literary Criticism* (Harlow: Longman, 1991).

been suggested, may be characterised by the "feminine carceral".[5] Writing on Wilkie Collins' novel *The Woman in White*, Tamar Heller argues that in fact this male gothic writer questioned Victorian ideologies of gender, highlighting "stories of femininity".[6] Feminist perspectives are also discernible in fiction written by men in the contemporary period; Robert Coover's gothic revision of the Snow White story rivals Carter in its pointed de-mythicising of the fairy tale form, to the extent that he too might qualify as a "female gothic" writer.[7]

Meanwhile, Iris Murdoch stands as a good example of a female writer whose fiction shows an awareness of the gothic tradition, but who is yet difficult to situate in a recognisable pattern of the female gothic. The three novels which have been identified as Murdoch's gothics (*The Flight from the Enchanter*, *The Unicorn*, and *The Time of the Angels*) reveal a movement from an open to a closed structure - a framework which Zohreh Sullivan suggests has more in common with the conventional gothic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than with revisionist approaches to the genre. Traditional features, such as the settings of dark, demonic labyrinths, appear in her novels, while in *The Time of the Angels*, the ruined and isolated rectory is used strictly as a metaphorical reflection on the dangers of solipsism in its various forms.[8] Aligned with a conservative aesthetics, Murdoch's work does not engage in an exploration of clearly feminist issues either; instead, her

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[5] Miller, D. A., "*Cage aux folles*: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*", *Representations*, 14 (Spring, 1986), pp.107-36 (pp.119-20). Miller concedes that Gilbert and Gubar's account of representations of the "madwoman" figure is informative, but, while the "feminine carceral" configuration may be part of a predominantly female tradition, he argues that carceral representations cannot easily be delineated male or female according to a distinction of literal or metaphorical orientation as they propose. Furthermore, feminist concerns which may be voiced by the "madwoman" in the nineteenth-century novel are, Miller reminds us, often "appropriated in antifeminist ways" within the text.

[6] Heller, Tamar, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and The Female Gothic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.2-8. It is also true that, out of concern for his readership, Collins contained his narratives of female subversion in the manner of their closure. While Heller acknowledges that Kahane and Modleski identify the female gothic as narratives about mothers and daughters, and also discusses "matrophobia", she argues that Collins' work describes female victimisation *and* encodes a plot of feminine subversion, thereby assigning it the category of the female gothic.

[7] Coover, Robert, "The Dead Queen" in Morrow, Bradford and Patrick McGrath (eds), *The New Gothic* (London: Picador, 1993 [1991]).

[8] Sullivan, Zohreh T., "The Contracting Universe of Iris Murdoch's Gothic Novels", *Modern Fiction Studies, 23* (Winter, 1977), pp.561-68 (p.561).

general subject is the moral and emotional decay of the present age. The tendency towards myth which can be found in *The Unicorn* leads Sullivan to make a fleeting comparison with *Wuthering Heights* as a means of establishing a gothic parallel, although the focus on incestuous behaviour in *The Time of the Angels* might have provided stronger evidence in her attempt to make this tenuous link with the Brontë novel.[9] Yet even here Murdoch's employment of such themes as incestuous tendencies demonstrates a breakdown in the moral code, thereby showing an affinity with Hume's interest in the moral problem of evil.[10] The atmosphere of oppression and melancholy may remind the reader of the traditional gothic, and this is just how Sullivan's selection of Murdoch's novels should be read: as using several conventions of the gothic in order to comment on "the ruins of a diseased age",[11] rather than focussing primarily on issues of gender.

While some regard the female gothic, then, as simply the female writer's response to and development of a 'male-oriented' literary tradition,[12] this 'subgenre' has also been variously formulated according to the following factors: the gender of the protagonist, a perception of inherently 'female' properties in the genre, the representation of female experience, a preoccupation with childhood ferocity, an emphasis on the grotesque

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[9] The Brontës' work has an uneasy position in gothic studies: while Coral Ann Howells cites *Jane Eyre* as the gothic novel which "marks the breakthrough for this kind of imaginative fiction into the everyday world", regarding it as a "coda" to the traditional gothic, other critics like Day are not so willing to include the Brontës in a discussion of the traditional genre at all. Day does not explore the gothic elements in their fiction and makes it clear that the Brontës do not belong to the genre proper, although they might well be "important vehicles for the diffusion of the style throughout our culture". Instead, Day blames their exclusion from the genre on their "individuality". See Day, William Patrick, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy*, p.2; and Howells, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction* (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), p.4.

[10] See Hume, Robert D., "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel", pp.282-90, discussed in Chapter One.

[11] Sullivan, p.566.

[12] Massé goes so far as to imply that the genre will come to an end through this process of female-authored subversion. She identifies the genre absolutely with a patriarchal system, so that "[w]hat finally does lay Gothic horror to rest is the refusal of masculine authority". See Massé, Michelle A., "Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things That Go Bump In The Night", *Signs* 15 (1990), pp.679-709 (p.709). Of course, the genre is not foreclosed by such intervention or interpretation; on the contrary, it contributes to one of the many sources of the gothic's transformation.

accompanied by the visualisation of the self, and the expression of female humour and anger. If critics of the female gothic do not base their use of the term on the gender of a writer, it is often the presence of a heroine which accounts for the generic distinction; if the protagonist of a text is 'female' and its form is recognisably 'gothic', it appears to conform to specifications of the 'female gothic'. This fails to make any real distinction between traditional gothic novels, in which a heroine is commonly the central figure, and a separate form of gothic writing described as female. Furthermore, in terms of late twentieth-century fiction, a considerable problem with this approach, exemplified by Mussell,[13] is that popular formulaic romances and innovative postmodernist fiction are then discussed with the same set of references - usually just the mutual instance of the subjects 'female' and 'gothic'.[14] In revising the term to read 'feminist gothic', we may derive this description not from the gender of the author or the central character, but rather from the manner of *presentation* of a text's gothic imagery and allusions, and the *consciousness* of this presentation, as Tania Modleski has proposed:

> The difference between popular Gothics - usually dismissed as escapist and trivial literature - and a militantly [*sic*] feminist Gothic novel...is that the latter explores on a conscious level conflicts which popular Gothics exploit, yet keep at an unconscious level.[15]

This concentration on self-reflexive presentation also points to the postmodernist traits evident in more 'serious' contemporary gothic writing.

Meanwhile, aspects of the genre itself continue to be characterised as "female". Addressing the existence of gothic traces in non-gothic literature of

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[13] Mussell, Kay J., "Gothic Novels" in Inge, M. Thomas (ed), *Handbook of American Popular Culture* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978). Mussell's interest in the gothic is confined to romance novels: "The gothic novel over two centuries reaffirms the romantic belief in love as the cure for evil", p.151; and ignores any feminist revisions of such conventions: "The stories still occur in a world in which marriage is seen as the best of all possible states for women", p.157.

[14] Obviously another flaw in this use of the term "female" is the inference of a universal referent. While we can look for similarities of experience, particularly among women of a similar class and cultural background, we cannot thereby assume a common female experience exists trans-historically and trans-nationally.

[15] Modleski, Tania, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York & London: Methuen, 1982), p.84. She makes the further, overly-neat distinction that "the Harlequin heroine's feelings undergo a transformation from fear into love, whereas for the Gothic heroine, the transformation is from love into fear", p.60.

the nineteenth century, Judith Wilt has written about the influence of the traditional genre on Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence.[16] Her study is relevant here because it contends that in the popular imagination the gothic is understood to be an *inherently* female genre:

> Freudian and feminist analysis offers provocative insight into this Gothic that has acquired in many people's minds the assumed modifier 'female' not only because of its main writers and readers but because of its deep revelations about gender, ego, and power.[17]

Three issues clearly emerge from this view: the question of authorship which has already been noted, the factor of readership, and the subject matter of cultural structures.

The modifier 'female' often results directly from an identification of a female readership; the 'popular' gothic, and its relation to the popular romance novel with its stereotypical heroine, has acquired a reputation for attracting a defined audience, one that is mainly female. Implying that reader response to both 'popular' and 'serious' gothic is the same, and that it is necessarily the response of women, Juliann Fleenor emphasises female readership as a defining factor in distinguishing the subgenre. Modleski's notion of "Gothic Novels For Women" is also predicated on a female readership, whereby gothic novels "serve in part to convince women that they are not their mothers" and from her psychoanalytic perspective, these texts enable women to work through the attendant difficulties in their "separation anxieties" and "oedipal conflicts".[18]

Fleenor relies on generalisations to read the female gothic as a literature for women and by women, which is a category too simplistic and exclusive to be successfully applied to the fiction of the women writers addressed in this thesis. The contemporary novels of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, for example, have not been called 'gothic' because their readership is primarily

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[16] Wilt does not pretend to include them in a generic classification, but seeks to demonstrate that each was imaginatively affected by the tradition and that this is reflected in the doctrinal concerns of their fiction. Wilt, Judith, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot and Lawrence* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[17] Wilt, p.3.

[18] Modleski, pp.71, 73.

female, nor because they write about romanticised heroines without a sense of irony, as neither is the case. While the romantic 'pulp' novel practises in formulae and stereotypes, 'serious' feminist fiction engages in literary experimentation and play with these same structures, and the gothic impulses in their writing are, crucially, intertwined with the feminist strategies in the texts.[19] It is only the aforementioned Freudian and feminist analyses which self-consciously pursue the issues of "gender, ego, and power" in the 'female' gothic, that unequivocally point to a feminist response to the genre. Since it is not only *women* writers who address the subject matter of these "feminist analyses", the category cannot be confined to the work of female writers alone.

The perception that the genre itself is implicitly gendered female also arises out of the belief that a connection between the gothic and women's writing has been latent in the genre since its inception, whereby the emergence of the gothic is attributable to a reaction against prevalent ideologies of the period. Where the predominant ideology is characterised as patriarchal, any counteractive impulse is regarded as female-oriented. To this end, Howells contrasts the dominant Augustan properties of order and rationality, with those of the gothic: guilt, fear, madness, imagination.[20] An explanation for a perceived feminisation of the genre is dependent on this dialectic in terms of style and content. Concepts which have traditionally been associated with women's writing, such as madness, are seen to disrupt and offset the Augustan characteristics. Yet this neat formula for the attraction of the gothic genre for early women writers, is equally applicable to other forms of subversiveness, such as political radicalism or conservatism, evident in interpretations of *Frankenstein*.[21] Although some feminist writing does continue to capitalise on the subversive nature of the gothic genre, in the case of contemporary fiction it is not sufficient to regard both feminist and gothic writing as subversive, and then to conclude that they share a 'genetic' relation

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[19] It is worth noting, however, that Tennant takes stock of these harlequin romances in the survey of mythic constructions of femininity which comprises her novel, *Sisters and Strangers*.

[20] Howells, Coral Ann, *Love, Mystery, and Misery*, p.4.

[21] See Baldick, Chris, *In Frankenstein's shadow: myth, monstrosity, and nineteenth-century writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

which makes them naturally equivalent.[22]

From a revisionist perspective, Moers attempts to establish a tradition of female gothic in which "women novelists and poets of today...are on the lookout for Gothic predecessors".[23] The problematised experience of childbirth is one prominent theme which modern writers have detected in the work of Mary Shelley; her now-famous reference to *Frankenstein* as "my hideous progeny" encourages such interpretations of the novel's focus on creation and monstrosity.[24] In Shelley's case, both biographical evidence about the author and textual interpretation highlight the theme of the birth myth.[25] Moers traces descendants of Shelley's gothic interpretation of the childbirth theme in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and in Sylvia Plath's poetry, in which a female voice expresses strongly ambivalent feelings about motherhood. An antipathetic reaction to childbirth, the sensation of "discomfort and innate repugnance of bearing within one's own body an alien being", is similarly included in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*.[26]

Here we can see that it is a specifically female issue addressed in the literature which forms the basis for this construction of a female gothic tradition. This is not to say that these women writers simply inserted female issues into the gothic structure, but rather that they regard these issues as gothic *by nature* from a female perspective. As early as the period in which Shelley was writing, the gothic was used by female writers to interpret reality

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[22] Not only is such an assertion reductive in relation to the gothic but it also discredits women's writing in figuring it only as symptoms of hysteria. Modleski, meanwhile, reading literature as symptom, suggests that gothic writing results from "the 'normal' feminine paranoid personality", and Harlequin romances from "the 'normal' feminine hysterical character". *Loving With a Vengeance*, p.81.

[23] Moers, *Literary Women*, p.97.

[24] Author's Introduction to 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1818]), p.60.

[25] Gilbert and Gubar agree with a reading of *Frankenstein* as a "woman's book", although they base their opinion on an interpretation of the book as "a fictionalized rendition of the meaning of *Paradise Lost* to women". *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p.221.

[26] Vincent, Sybil Korff, "The Mirror and the Cameo: Margaret Atwood's Comic/Gothic Novel, *Lady Oracle*" in Fleenor, Juliann E., *The Female Gothic* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1983), pp.153-63 (p.156).

itself, a sophisticated fictional practice which a genre based in fantasy often belies. In light of this, it is worth remembering that

> to confront the long engagement of women writers with the Gothic tradition is to be reminded that its eccentricities have been thought of, from Mrs. Radcliffe's time to our own, as indigenous to 'women's fantasy'.[27]

In this way, the female gothic with its subject matter of women's experience has been largely marginalised through its generic classification. As noted briefly in the case of the homosexual gothic (see Chapter 1, section III), for instance, themes conventionally associated with a certain group are sometimes pathologised, and then re-presented as 'natural' material of the gothic.

The often violent world of adolescence is frequently posited as such material. A gothic reading of *Wuthering Heights* is made possible by the suggestion that its sibling cruelties truly reflect the antagonisms, the "night side", of the Victorian nursery,[28] and the experience of this stage of life is represented as alienating, threatening, 'gothic'. This interpretation produces a similar reading of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market", one which suggests that the Victorian gothic portrays a darker side of the lives of children in that period, exposing childish cruelty and the taboo of childhood sexuality. Moers' reading of these texts, then, points to the imaginative creation of a 'child-monster' which depicts, although usually in exaggerated form, a perception of Victorian childhood. These monster characters of the early female gothic suggest, according to Moers, that "particularly female experiences...contributed to the disturbing eccentricity of the tale".[29] So, here, knowledge of the gender of the writer and biographical information about the life of a woman writing in the nineteenth century are crucial to the reading of these texts as gothic. A related theme, however, continues to have direct relevance in contemporary fiction: "[t]he savagery of girlhood accounts in part for the persistence of the Gothic mode into our own time".[30] This is precisely

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[27] Moers, p.100.

[28] Moers, p.105.

[29] Moers, p.101.

[30] Moers, p.107.

the subject of Emma Tennant's novella, *The Queen of Stones*, which takes Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) as a thematic blueprint. Yet neither of these novels of adolescence is restricted to Moers' historical reading of the specificity of the Victorian period, nor to the gender of the writer.[31]

In concert with this last theme is "the compulsion to visualize the self" which Moers identifies as central to the configuration of the genre in the work of Carson McCullers and Plath.[32] This compulsion is responsible for the array of "haunting monsters of ambivalence" in McCullers' work.[33] While her fiction properly belongs to the southern American tradition of the gothic, its portrayal of 'freakish' characters may owe something to a perception of the female as freakish, too. Such perception and presentation of the female self as "monstrous" is clearly not the provenance of twentieth-century writing alone;[34] yet the understanding of the "freak" for McCullers is inextricably related to the spectacle of the side-show, still popular in the southern states of America when she was young.[35]

Lidoff, remarking that Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) is an example of a "domestic Gothic", has also traced signs of the gothic in women's writing into the present.[36] In this novel, the advent of female puberty is described in grotesque terms, exacerbating the negative female self-image. The character Louie is seen as a "great stinking monster" who identifies with eccentric people outside the family circle and fears that she is

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[31] Another example of this is Ian McEwan's novel *The Cement Garden* (1978).

[32] Moers, p.107.

[33] Moers, p.108.

[34] Barbara Johnson compares the autobiographical writing of feminists Dinnerstein and Friday with Shelley's *Frankenstein* in her essay, "My Monster/ My Self",in which she argues that all three "deploy a *theory* of autobiography as monstrosity", *Diacritics* 12 (1982), pp.2-10 (p.10).

[35] In the 1920s, the Chattahoochee Valley Fair, including a sideshow of 'freaks' in its Greatest Show on Earth, visited McCullers' hometown of Columbus, Georgia each year. Later, in 1937, she declined to visit a "deaf-and-dumb" convention in Georgia, preferring to rely on her imagination in devising her characters. Carr, Virginia Spencer, *The Lonely Hunter* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp.1, 19.

[36] Lidoff, Joan, "Domestic Gothic: The Imagery of Anger in Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*", *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979), pp.201-15 (p.201). It is worth noting here that in the early 1980s Weldon went out to Australia to work on a screenplay of Christina Stead's novel, *For Love Alone*. "Love and Truth in Bad Times", Suzanne Lowry interviews Weldon, *Sunday Times* (19 September 1982), p.38.

a "freak".[37] Lidoff makes the connection here to McCullers' outsiders, since both writers use such characters to show the difficulties of female adolescence. The feelings of disorientation which accompany the period of adolescence permeate the world of the book as a whole. Everything is intensified by the "violent colors of fantasy life" and by distorted imagery which exposes the "mutilated inner self to public view".[38] Lidoff believes that Stead's "domestic Gothic" is the aesthetic transformation of repressed female anger. Henny is a character who is unable to establish boundaries between her private self and the world around her, and so finds herself inside a gothic nightmare:

> Henny wanders in 'the alien atmosphere of the freakish, Bosch-like hell' encountering animated objects and animalized people - weird aggressive creatures who act as angry as she feels.[39]

Yet such distortions, blurred boundaries, and techniques of the grotesque ("the emotional and mataphorical excesses of a Gothic novel"[40]) although admitting some fantasy material, exist within a framework of realism. Through the use of the gothic, Stead's novel moves to subvert certain social norms - most notably, the disapproval of female self-assertion and aggression. As in Weldon's *She-Devil*, the novel uses images of physical self-disgust in order to convey the expression of female anger. Similarly, in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*, anxiety about an 'other' self figured by the dangerous double is expressed in a scene in which the protagonist Joan looks in the mirror at her self-as-celebrity and realises: "My dark twin, my funhouse mirror reflection...She wanted to kill me and take my place."[41] Here McCullers' "freaks" of the fair meet Plath's images of self-hatred, and anticipate the "ghastly attraction of the deformed" (*H&V*, p.86) still current in contemporary gothic.

A compulsion to visualise the self in Plath's poetry results in complex

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[37] Lidoff, pp.210-11.

[38] Lidoff, p.210.

[39] Lidoff, p.206.

[40] Lidoff, p.203.

[41] *Lady Oracle* quoted by Vincent, in Fleenor, p.161.

and disturbing images of self-consciousness balanced on the paradox of perceiving the body both as self and as other. Plath may be considered in relation to a female gothic tradition because of the sense of entrapment she describes and her use of the grotesque. The monsters in nineteenth-century British fiction and the freaks of the southern American tradition located the grotesque in objective images of the self - at least materially speaking. In Plath's poetry, the image which inspires revulsion is one's own body. The "smiling woman" in Plath's poem, "Lady Lazarus", feels trapped in her body in much the same way that Frankenstein's monster does; certainly both confront the fact that they are composed of dead or dying parts. Perhaps more than any other, this theme of visualisation is significant in the interpretation of contemporary gothic written by women. The arresting images of Plath's poetry end Moers' discussion of the female gothic, and the anxiety these images express about the material body provides the present discussion with a point of continuation to explore the gothic written since Plath.

Expressions of anger, however, do not obscure the humorous aspects of the contemporary gothic. Making the distinction between the operations of humour now and in the last century, Vincent suggests that

> unlike Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, a comic novel satirizing the readers of Gothic novels, Atwood's comic novel satirizes the Gothic but understands its function.[42]

This reference to Austen's novel underscores the dual nature of Atwood's book; the latter does ridicule the readers of *popular* romance gothics, but it also displays a feminist gothic sensibility on several levels, not least in its distinctions between high and low literary forms, but also in its serious treatment of the theme of female self-perception.

Like female rage, female humour has been largely suppressed or disguised in literary texts by women before the modern period.[43] Vincent is right to point to the emergence of the laughing heroine in the contemporary

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[42] Vincent in Fleenor, p.162.

[43] See Barreca, Regina R. "Hate and Humor in Women's Writing: A Discussion of Twentieth-Century Authors", PhD dissertation (City University of New York, 1987). Barreca argues that "Anger and hate are catastrophic, chaotic and therefore generative. They destroy limits and systems, allowing for growth." p.141. She regards the function of humour in women-authored texts in much the same way.

gothic, when she claims that "the piercing scream of the terrified Gothic heroine seems to be giving way to the nervous giggle of the uncertain/Gothic heroine".[44] Yet Vincent's images do not agree with those of the 'serious' gothic; rather, they belong to the updated versions of the popular romance novel which features giggling and uncertain women. As we will see, when the comic is employed by writers such as Fay Weldon, it is often used with devastating effect as an expression of a female character's (often destructive) will.

By stressing the comic elements of Atwood's novel, Vincent proposes a category of gothic dependent on a female perspective:

> Atwood has created a new sub-genre - the comic/Gothic - which more accurately depicts the psychological condition of the modern woman than does the traditional Gothic novel.[45]

A possible example of "comic/Gothic" can be found in Tennant's *Woman Beware Woman*, when the gothic setting of Cliff Hold is mocked by the visiting Fran: "Suitable for the Man in the Iron Mask, no mod cons, impossible to escape." (*WBW*, p.124) Her parodic synopsis of the Irish country house, in the form of a real-estate advertisement, enunciates the clash between the old world of this gothic locale and a modern sensibility, including her sense of humour, in the character of the feminist photo-journalist Fran.

Yet, implicit in the naming of Vincent's new 'sub-genre' is a clearly understood and sharply demarcated 'gothic' - which, as we have seen, is problematic in that its meaning cannot be fixed by the word 'genre', having developed beyond the static, easily identifiable conventions of the traditional gothic into a more elusive and amorphous type of writing. Certainly the comic is an important element in the gothic as it is written by women, but this does not mean that it constitutes a 'sub-genre' of its own. We might here recall Lewis' argument, discussed in the last chapter, that all gothic is to some extent "perched on the thin line between humor and fear".[46] The female gothic itself resists the term 'genre' as it exists through a varied collection of

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[44] Vincent, p.163.

[45] Vincent, p.153.

[46] Lewis, p.312.

themes and images which often interact with other genre fragments in a text, as we have seen in the discussion on the postmodernist novel. Similarly, Lidoff's "domestic Gothic" does not constitute a significant contribution to the critical idiom, considering the consensus that, as it developed, the gothic in general gradually inscribed a more intimate setting than did its precursors. In fact, while the "domestic" gothic may point to a more personalised genre focused on, say, the female figure, this term also seems to imply a limitation in the scope of women's gothic writing as if it were myopic in its disregard of broader socio-cultural issues, beyond the domestic sphere. While Carter, Tennant, and Weldon often set their novels in enclosed spaces, such as *The Magic Toyshop*, *Hotel de Dream*, and *The Shrapnel Academy*, their subject matter is not similarly confined and widely refers to the world outside.

Therefore, while it is true to say that the gothic can be "modified in the hands of women writers", it is important to remember that there have been varying degrees of literary experimentation amidst this general modification. To bring the two predominant strains together to prove the existence of a clearly demarcated category known as the "female gothic" is not helpful in understanding contemporary texts which have moved away from being exponents of a single genre into polymorphic narratives which often display feminist perspectives.[47] Fleenor is right to point to the use of the gothic by women writers to express and amplify themes of protest, rage, and humour, but novels by the contemporary writers discussed here cannot be defined by one particular genre, even though they display many of the "female gothic" characteristics highlighted by these critics.

Particularly pertinent to representations of the female body in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon are both Fleenor's contention that the female gothic is written in response to 'male' structures, both cultural and literary, which she terms the 'patriarchal paradigm', and also Karen Stein's argument that Moers

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[47] Referring to the articles in her book, Fleenor asserts that "these essays *define* the Female Gothic", yet it is difficult to be convinced that this is so since the book attempts to account for two very different types of writing - the popular gothic and the serious gothic - and the anthology must stretch its scope to include these two types and their respective critics. Introduction, Fleenor, p.24, emphasis added.

fails "to take into account the male-defined context of female behaviour".[48] Male disgust with female sexuality, Stein believes, is "the root of the Female Gothic", whereby women have internalised the cultural stereotypes of good woman/bad woman, for example, and experience the elementary psychological split of the gothic character as distorted perceptions of the female body. This description of compounded fragmentation in the characters of female-authored gothic texts leads her to present this definition:

> The Female Gothic may thus be seen as a version of the Gothic created by women authors to explore formerly unspeakable, 'monstrous' aspects of women's lives.[49]

In their depictions of the female figure, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon accentuate its iconography which makes such "formerly unspeakable" territory a region of striking articulacy.

There are two sides to this quality of the monstrous which are explored in women's fiction: the invisible and the visible. Tension between perceptions of reality and appearance is characteristic of the gothic, but this tension takes acute forms in the 'female' gothic. Here it leads to a sense of self-disgust which is then embodied by the grotesque. The private experience of self-disgust expressed in the female gothic seems to indicate that the gothic monster of contemporary fiction no longer resembles its predecessor; the physicality of monstrousness has been internalised. Sibyl James describes how this inversion can be detected in the modern female gothic:

> In the modern usage the physical aspect of the monster is often translated into the characters who are in some way psychological or sociological misfits and outcasts.[50]

Often the role of "misfit" is a self-cast one - a case of self-*mis*perception. In reaction to the imposition of conventional attitudes (social, cultural, usually patriarchal), female characters often view themselves as monstrous and the relationship between the apparently 'normal' self (which is presented to the world of the narrative) and the private 'deviant' self becomes the focus of the

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[48] Stein, Karen, "Monsters and Madwomen: Changing Female Gothic" in Fleenor, pp.123-37 (p.124).

[49] Stein in Fleenor, p.126.

[50] James, "Gothic Transformations: Isak Dinesen and the Gothic" in Fleenor, pp.138-52 (p.149).

story. This comprises the "formerly unspeakable" and invisible, because internalised, aspect of the monstrous.[51]

The monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein* is often read as the visibly monstrous manifestation of the evil half of his creator's nature, and his existence hints at the universal risk of psychic duality and confrontation. In the Victorian period, as Kelly Hurley's impressive study shows, the theme of monstrosity was written into novels to indicate gross levels of immorality or deviance, and the subjects ranged from supernatural visitors to black people and women - that is, anyone who seemed to differ from the (white and male) norm. Monstrosity in the earlier gothic is sited in the physicality of difference, an interest fuelled by the popularity of criminal anthropology's belief that the capacity for deviance could be physically calibrated. The notion that "deviant miscegeny could be read across the body", translated easily into some of the best-known gothic literature of the period.[52] The interpretive approach of "reading across the body" to discover metaphorical identities determined by culture continues to be applicable in the explication of contemporary gothic (and is fundamental to the methodology of Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

In her emphasis on the visible aspects of the theme of monstrosity in contemporary literature, Claire Kahane bases her definition of the female gothic on Moers' conclusion that what is seen is more terrifying than what is hidden. In contrast to the Burkean idea that terror depends on obscurity, the female gothic instead is oriented towards "an emphasis on *visual* images of deformity". Kahane explains that women writers have

> a special eye for the imagery of self-hatred, for those signifiers of negative identity - the freak, the dwarf, the cripple - that abound

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[51] In relation to this topic of psychological dualities, it is interesting to note that Stein argues the case that the female gothic is "changing" because some contemporary writers are creating female heroic patterns to parallel the male myth of a heroic journey. Using R. D. Laing's notion of the 'divided self', Stein notes that these new heroines are able to heal their psychic splits and in this way, "redefine and revalue the female role" in fiction. She measures any transformation of the gothic then by this figure of the hero/heroine. See Fleenor, p.126.

[52] Hurley, Kelly, *The Novel of the Gothic Body: Deviance, Abjection, and Late-Victorian Popular Fiction*, PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1988. (Published by Cambridge University Press in 1996.) Hurley traces what was known as the "downward modification" (descent into deviance) attributed to the marginalised - women, non-whites, and the lower classes.

in the modern Female Gothic.[53]

A discussion of the 'grotesque-Gothic' in Flannery O'Connor's work again points to the similarities between the female gothic and the southern American tradition of the gothic. The latter is now a well-recognised development of the genre, and the female gothic has as many themes in common with this strain as it does with the original English tradition. The point of convergence here is the very topic of Kahane's essay - the grotesque. In O'Connor, "the protagonists of the grotesque-Gothic continually find physical images of the body as vulnerable and impaired".[54] A common experience of the protagonists in gothic written by women, the female form is problematised in contrast to the male form, resulting in explorations of gendered subject/object configurations, and the 'imprisonment' of the female figure within cultural formations subsequently posited within terms of the grotesque.

It is possible to locate the attraction of the grotesque for contemporary feminist writers in an apt definition of this literary phenomenon:

> a mode which emphasizes incongruity, disorder, deformity, and arises from the juxtaposition or clash of the ideal with the real, the psychic with the physical, or the concrete with the symbolic.[55]

The contrast between the ideal and the real is the foundation upon which the grotesque stands. We have seen in the critical discussion about postmodernism that perceptions of the real are open to interrogation, now more than ever. Feminist debate, both cultural and literary, questions the general interpretations of how we arrive at 'the ideal' - for instance, the 'perfect' female body image. An increasing number of writers inscribe

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[53] Kahane, "The Maternal Legacy: The Grotesque Tradition in Flannery O'Connor's Female Gothic" in Fleenor, pp.242-56 (p.244). This interest in visuals, in 'the gaze', and in images of eyes and mirrors is found in much women's writing. Consequently, the interdisciplinary use of film criticism in the study of feminist fiction is increasingly popular.

[54] Kahane, in Fleenor, p.244.

[55] Northey, Margot, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p.6. Novak's definition of the grotesque is also useful: "the combination of conventionalized organizational structures, ideas and characters in fiction dealing with the supernatural and bizarre from the time of Horace Walpole to the present day". See Maximillian E. Novak, "Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 13 (Fall, 1979), pp.50-67 (p.50). Although much has been made of Carter's debt to Bakhtin, the grotesque as it is theorised in his notion of the carnivalesque is not the most pertinent conception of the grotesque in reading Carter, or indeed the contemporary gothic generally. The grotesque is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

revisionist versions of conventional fairy tales into their work, in which omitted grotesque elements are re-introduced and 'sanitised' versions of the tales are undone through an emphasis on the grotesque.

The grotesque is frequently encountered not in the Other but in the self; consequently, when women have written the gothic, "the horror they conveyed was at their own bodies and even their rebellion."[56] By centralising the grotesque representations of these bodies, the writers expose the problems of self-representation and self-perception, the equivocal relationship between mind and body experienced by many women. As Fleenor has noted, the "Female Gothic is historically defined by the culture" in which it is written;[57] it is possible to see how contemporary *feminist* gothic reflects current debates about the figuration of the female body, and amply demonstrates how this use of the gothic is informed by its intellectual and cultural contexts.

Black humour, the grotesque, the female body, revisions of fairy tales - these are all themes and images which are featured in the modern 'female' gothic, yet they also relate to distinctly feminist issues. When Fleenor accounts for the woman writer's possible interest in the gothic - "the Gothic has been used to voice rebellion and anger over the status of women"[58] - she articulates a feminist position. We are reminded here of the self-consciousness of presentation attributed to the revised genre and of the critical impulses embedded in certain uses of the gothic. Although Vincent sees the 'female gothic' as a category "within" the genre proper, one which nevertheless "specifically deals with female anxieties and conflicts from a female perspective",[59] it is the *feminist* gothic which should now be read as a separate development of the genre with specific designs determinable within Fowler's concept of a generic "tertiary phase".[60] Regarded as the women's version of 'the real thing', 'female' gothic literature is restricted to a position

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[56] Fleenor, p.13.

[57] Fleenor, p.16.

[58] Fleenor, Juliann E., "The Gothic Prism: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Gothic Stories and her Autobiography" in Fleenor, pp.227-41 (p.227).

[59] Vincent, in Fleenor, p.155.

[60] Fowler, p.162.

of supplementation. The feminist gothic, meanwhile, should be discerned as a particular critical position which questions patriarchal structures, and as a way of reading, whereby the text itself, through its accord of creative and critical impulses, gestures toward this reading.

Perception of the gothic "as a way of relating to the real"[61] corresponds to this feminist reading of the gothic which in turn produces a series of contemporary themes as a consequence of its perspective on reality, and to an extent continues an earlier phenomenon underlining the subversive potential promised by the gothic mode: "Female Gothicists had adopted the anti-rationalistic Gothic both to reproduce and yet challenge the patriarchal world in which they lived".[62] As we will see, the writers today whose fiction discloses a self-conscious awareness of this tradition, continue to make such a challenge, but modified in the sense that "rationalism" is *part* of their confrontation with literary and cultural traditions.[63]

The present study, then, follows a shift in gothic studies during the 1980s towards a "feminist-marked Gothic criticism", characterised by its close attention to representations of gender and female experience.[64] Rather than trying to argue the case for an autonomous female tradition, however, the identification of a generational group of writers who employ the gothic is here concerned with the genre's focus on representations of femininity (specifically, the chokered body, the black female body, and the posthuman body - the subjects of Chapters 3, 4, and 5). How the gothic genre and its fragmented tropes act as a vehicle for the exploration of discursive traditions which inscribe the female body is a question central to the reading of Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's fiction.

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[61] Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror*, p.14.

[62] Fleenor, p.13.

[63] Baldick notes Carter's "rationalist feminism" when introducing her gothic tale, "The Lady of the House of Love". Baldick, Chris (ed), *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiii.

[64] Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York & London: Methuen, 1986), vii. Sedgwick specifically mentions the female-centered readings by Claire Kahane on maternity and by Barbara Johnson on the "monstrosity" of self-presentation.

## II. The Fantasy of Women

Since the 1960s, fantastic forms have assumed a prominence in British writing; accounting for this preference, Doris Lessing suggests that "novelists everywhere are breaking the bonds of the realistic novel because what we all see around us becomes daily wilder, more fantastic, incredible".[65] Concurring with Punter's assertion that in modern times reality itself appears to be gothic, this perception that reality is "incredible" has particular resonance for women in the political potential of such 'de-naturalisation' (when applied to 'real' constructions of femininity, for instance). As a descriptive term, "female fantasy", like "female gothic", does not in itself imply a critical appraisal of cultural structures. Contemporary *feminist* fiction, however, enlists the operation of fantasy in such a critical enterprise, and in turn contributes to a politicisation of the genre itself.[66] Just as feminist writing employs gothic tropes in order to comment on cultural discourses, so the feminist engagement with the fantastic may be perceived as political in the same sense. However, this aspect of fantastic writing is not always immediately apparent. Indeed, the fantastic is often labelled escapist, marginalised within women's writing, or strictly categorised as utopian.

The form's political potential in women's writing contrasts then with its interpretation as escapist fantasy, a difference that is parallel to the aforementioned distinction between feminist gothic and gothic romance novels. The operation of the fantastic in Carter's fiction, for instance, has occasionally been misunderstood: Massie believes that Carter's "imagination is self-consuming, unable to project itself beyond the immediate work", which itself

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[65] Lessing, *Shikasta* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p.ix. Massé agrees: "The boundaries between Gothic and real clearly are not as fixed as we once thought." This is largely due, she argues, to the fact that the supernatural is no longer the touchstone of gothic definitions. See Massé, Michelle A., "Gothic Repetition", *Signs* 15 (1990), p.689.

[66] As we saw in the last chapter, Fowler argues that it is only in this "tertiary phase" of the genre that gothic "shows much awareness of sociopolitical meaning". Fowler, p.163.

consequently lacks any direct relation to the 'real' world.[67] The orientation of the fantastic towards the real forms the crux of the problem in identifying the genre's function. Carter for one does not shun the contemporary nor the controversial in her affection for the marvellous. The difficulty is, as Lorna Sage makes clear, that Carter's work does not conform to 'social' realism; it could more accurately be described as "neo-realist".[68] The apparently complex relation of such fantastic fiction to a discernible form of realism renders the term 'magic realism' especially pertinent here. Suggestive of the generic hybridity present in their writing, this term has been invoked to characterise the fiction of Carter and Tennant alike.[69] Weldon's writing too has been characterised as "a conscious and expressive flouting of conventional realism".[70]

The fantastic, then, is not simply a special sub-species of fantasy; its most notable features are important to bear in mind when investigating how the gothic operates in contemporary writing, in particular through its devices of criticism and irony. What Nancy Miller has called a "chafing" against unsatisfactory representations of reality encoded by the dominant culture, constitutes a resistance which often takes the form of fantasy.[71] This resistance does not necessarily involve a complete departure from such representations into a wholly unfamiliar fictional realm, but rather promotes

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[67] Massie, Alan, *The Novel Today: A Critical Guide to the British Novel 1970-1989* (London & New York: Longman, 1990), p.55. However, as Wilson points out, even when one of Carter's texts "appears crystalline in its artfulness,...there will be conclusions for the contextualist to draw". Wilson, Robert Rawdon, "SLIP PAGE: Angela Carter, In/Out/In the Postmodern Nexus", *Ariel* 20 (October, 1989), p.112. David Punter also recognises that her novels are "postmodernist without losing sight of the real world". Punter, "Essential Imaginings: the Novels of Angela Carter and Russell Hoban", in Acheson, James (ed), *The British and Irish Novel Since 1960* (New York: St Martins Press, 1991), p.156.

[68] Sage, Lorna in Bradbury, Malcolm and Judith Cooke (eds), *New Writing* (London: Minerva, 1992), pp.185-93 (p.187).

[69] Massie, p.55.

[70] Lodge, David, "Trouble with mother", *Sunday Times*, 26 September, 1982, p.32. (Review of *The President's Child*) Where Weldon's plot becomes implausible, Lodge asks, "What counts as implausible after Chappaquiddick and Watergate?" Weldon's writing is branded "postmodernist" in this article largely due to her well-known spacing device which draws attention to "the rhythm and texture of the language itself".

[71] Miller, Nancy K., *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988 [1981]), p.44. It is important to recognise, as Miller argues, that "the fictions of desire behind the desiderata of fiction are masculine and not universal constructs".

a direct challenge to them. Accordingly, the fantastic frequently operates as the material of criticism:

> The frequent use of fantasy...in the contemporary novel by women constitutes both a response to the perceived absurdity of contemporary patriarchy and an impulse to envision an alternate reality that either corrects or intensifies the ills of the present.[72]

Nancy Walker's account of fantasy's impulses of revision or exaggeration points to the critical exploration of cultural structures evinced by many women writers of the fantastic, whether they favour escapist or realist visions. Fantasy in this sense is the work of literary, cultural, and political criticism. The tradition of women's fantastic writing is centred, according to Jackson, on the ability of a text to "fantasize a violent attack on the symbolic order".[73] Echoing the immoderate nature of imagining the familiar as unfamiliar, Walker confirms that "the re-visioning of contemporary reality requires the radical and even violent use of the imagination".[74]

Despite its recognition as "a way of showing the absurdity of the human condition",[75] Tennant herself has described fantasy as a much-maligned genre. There are times, she claims, when it is important to "get as far away from realism and remembered detail as possible", in order to convey the perspective of a child, for example, on the "strange, forgotten landscape" of his or her own surroundings.[76] Attention to representations of the real instigated by this shift in perception inevitably points to a relation between fantasy and the realist mode. Hence Carter writes "across the gap that has conventionally divided fantasy and realism"[77] - a description also applicable to those novels by Tennant and Weldon which are curiously pitched between

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[72] Walker, Nancy A., *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women* (Jackson & London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), p.147.

[73] Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p.103.

[74] Walker, *Feminist Alternatives*, p.154.

[75] Tennant, *The ABC of Writing* (London: Faber, 1992), p.49.

[76] Tennant, in "A Strong Story-telling Impulse" in Sellers, Susan (ed), *Delighting the Heart: A Notebook by Women Writers* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p.76.

[77] Sage, Lorna, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-war Women Novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.177.

these two modes.

Acknowledging this emergent strain of speculative fiction in recent women's writing, Rita Felski suggests that the majority of feminist writers are, in fact, currently engaged with a realist mode of expression, noting a "current predominance of realist forms".[78] While realism may be a persistent organising principle within much of this writing, the interactive relationship between realism and other forms produces the most interesting configurations in terms of specifying the gothic. In a discussion of feminist science fiction writing, Penny Florence argues a comparable position to Felski:

> Contemporary feminist writers in English do not, on the whole, write fantasy. Even where we do, or where our writing has prominent fantasy elements, the crucial reality-orientation remains.[79]

So when Tennant also writes of a "return to a *Golden Notebook* realism, a clearer look at women's situation", she is recognising a distinctive mixture of realist and fantastic aspects, for the style of Lessing's novel has been summed up as "a chaos of recorded and imagined experience" where "[t]ruth is multiple and fragmentary".[80] The effect is one which counteracts realism's ambitions of narrative transparency and authenticity, and correlates to postmodernism's suspicion of objective and singular reality.

Discussing the overlap between the fantastic and the gothic in women's writing, Flora Alexander understands the use of these forms as "a mode in which dreams, or metaphors, are employed to say something about social and historical or psychological realities."[81] This conflation of the terms "dreams" and "metaphors" is telling, as it points to a semantic distance between the

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[78] Felski, Rita, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.16.

[79] Florence, Penny, "The Liberation of Utopia, or Is Science Fiction the Ideal Contemporary Women's Form" in Anderson, Linda (ed), *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), pp.65-83 (p.69).

[80] Tennant, "A Pandora's Box for Writing" in Sellers, *Delighting the Heart*, p.189. Tennant concedes that her own work tends more toward "fable". For commentary on Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, see Spacks, Patricia Meyer, *The Female Imagination: A literary and psychological investigation of women's writing* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), p.310.

[81] Alexander, Flora, *Contemporary Women Novelists* (London & New York: Edward Arnold, 1989), p.61.

realm of fantasy, composed of a discernible language of images,[82] and the realm of reality. However, this account of the fantastic mode actually underscores a crucial focus in the work of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon - the unmasking of the metaphoricity of cultural discourses - since fantastic writing also addresses the metaphors *belonging to* these same "social and historical or psychological realities".

In its attention to metaphoric language, then, feminist writing displays a sensitivity to the act of representation itself. Looking askance at reality leads the 'alternative tradition' of the fantastic in women's writing to question strictly realist forms:

> It is surely no coincidence that so many writers and theorists of fantasy as a countercultural form are women - Julia Kristeva, Irène Bessière, Hélène Cixous, Angela Carter. Non-realist narrative forms are increasingly important in feminist writing: no breakthrough of cultural structure seems possible until linear narrative (realism, illusionism, transparent representation) is broken or dissolved.[83]

This statement encapsulates the appeal of the fantastic for *critics* of cultural structures and demonstrates common ground for theorists and novelists. As Brooks Landon has argued, it may be that the fantastic is actually created as an effect of the manipulation of other genres, like the gothic; that is, through the exploitation of "the metafictional potential of formula literature by using the reversal of formulaic patterns as a source of the fantastic".[84] From this perspective, feminist writers also revise the gothic since gothic is a "cultural

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[82] All language is, of course, metaphoric, in the sense that it is impossible to write *beyond* metaphor as Derrida has made clear in "White Mythology", *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982 [1972]); I mean here, instead, that a specific *vocabulary* emerges. Metaphors "are seldom the objects of examination and self-consciousness. They are more likely to wear the masks of translucency and fact." Wilson, "SLIP PAGE", *Ariel* 20, pp.96-97. The attention to metaphoricity in some contemporary women's writing accords with the theoretical and historical 'postmodernisms' outlined by Wilson.

[83] Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p.186, n.10.

[84] Landon, Brooks, "Eve at the End of the World: Sexuality and the Reversal of Expectations in Novels by Joanna Russ, Angela Carter, and Thomas Berger" in Palumbo, Donald (ed), *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.73.

structure" itself.[85] It is not only cultural structures against which the fantastic "chafes", but literary structures, such as the gothic, too.[86]

The ironic treatment of certain generic, and social, conventions - those formulaic patterns - provides a useful distinction between the romance 'gothics' and 'serious' contemporary literature: the former are unironic and reproduce the convention of the marriage plot, for example, whereas the latter is often celebrated for its irony. Tennant's own quip about this device - "**Irony**, the dry-Martini-with-olive of Western culture"[87] - points to its perceived sophistication (even suggesting a classist distinction between popular and high culture). Indeed, the fulcrum of this fantasy often proves to be irony, what Carter has described as "a knife edge between parody and seriousness";[88] the imaginative work involved in 'revision' and 'fantasy' is impelled by this device. Irony furnishes the glass through which we perceive the distance of which Walker writes: Weldon, who has been called "a mistress of irony", has written novels that are

> relentless in deconstructing the received wisdom of a culture by revealing the terrible ironic distance between official cultural images...and actual human realities.[89]

It is a central point in the study of contemporary feminist writing that, "[t]he revision of self and history, the emergence of the ironic voice, and the fantasy of an alternative reality are common narrative elements."[90] Just as Walker identifies the elements of irony and fantasy at work within the feminist text, it is possible to see these strategies intersecting with gothic elements in the

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[85] By relating generic structure to cultural structure, Heilman's reading of the subversive tendencies in Charlotte Brontë's work - in which irruptions occur in the expected pattern - also recognises that a sense of pattern can be discerned in narrative form, in social steroetypes, and in the more general 'symbolic order'. Heilman in Rathburn, *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad.*

[86] Lorna Sage rightly refutes the simplicity of the Gilbert and Gubar model of female fantasy as antithesis, suggesting instead that some contemporary novels by women "start with more sophisticated assumptions, in a setting where the structures of power (literary and otherwise) are a lot less obvious." See Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.168, discussing Carter's work.

[87] Tennant, *The ABC of Writing* (London: Faber, 1992), p.47.

[88] Carter in Kenyon, *Writing Women*, p.16.

[89] Carter in Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.111; Walker, *Feminist Alternatives*, p.186.

[90] Walker, p.79.

work of writers like Weldon.

One effect of the ironic detachment of the feminist heroine is more than a disavowal of the traditional plot - "she has also achieved distance form many of the myths and conventions that had prevented her from being the author of her own life."[91] Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop*, for example, tries on various identities familiar to her and also becomes disoriented when the 'plot' of her life does not proceed as she expected it would. Once the regime of Uncle Philip is abolished, she steps into a new dimension, an unimagined space. Hence one of the principal points of interest in the use of fantasy for contemporary women writers is this possibility of escaping cultural prescriptions and creating a new, and self-determined, story for their female characters. When Tennant asks: "What kinds of myths are girls brought up on...?", she articulates one of the central questions in women's writing today.[92]

However, creating such 'new' stories does not involve a complete escape from those cultural images and myths relevant to female identification. As Nan Albinski's study of utopian and dystopian writing by British women makes clear, Carter for one does not use fantasy in order to construct an example of what Walker describes as an "alternative reality"; on the contrary, she writes, "Carter's glittering fantasies belong with th[e] tradition of [anti-utopian] satire".[93] Indeed, it is the "dystopian" stance of some of her fiction from which its more obvious generic identity is derived; in *Heroes and Villains*, for example, the effects of nuclear war "heighten the sense of the 'otherness' in her modern Gothic, transforming mundane society into a fantastic

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[91] Walker, p.110.

[92] Tennant in Sellers, *Delighting the Heart*, p.75.

[93] Albinski, Nan Bowman, *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), p.140. Michael on the other hand suggests that in *Nights at the Circus*, "[t]he fantastic enables Carter to bypass and undermine phallic power and to posit other forms of power." See Michael, Magali Cornier, "Angela Carter's 'Nights at the Circus': An Engaged Feminism via Subversive Postmodern Strategies", *Contemporary Literature* 35 (Fall, 1994), pp.492-521 (p.512). She takes as her example the incident in which Fevvers flies away form her attacker, suggesting that"self-empowerment" is achieved - but this is a utopian solution, unless we note Michael's caveat that Fevvers' wings are similar to her story-telling, in which case the fantastic operates as metaphor or allegory. Michael's principal argument is that Carter's writing is founded on a dialectic of Marxist and utopian feminist positions.

landscape".[94]Again the banal made fantastic, even grotesque, is what constitutes much of the contemporary gothic for these writers.

Finally, then, the use of dreams, fantasies, and madness may be grouped together by "the concept of boundaries to be transgressed".[95] As "women's fiction tends to be enclosed, bounded by rooms, walls, gender restrictions - even the body itself",[96] it is the use of the fantastic which enables the characters, often enclosed in spaces of domesticity, to transcend this sense of entrapment even temporarily. The fantastic becomes the means for transcending many types of boundaries, including "the limitations of a female body in our society", and thus the impetus we associate with the quintessential plot of gothic literature.[97] Feminist gothic identifies, frequently in accentuated form, the cultural restrictions experienced by women. The familiar patterns which constitute one kind of boundary are found in a tradition of iconography associated with the representation of the female body. The fantastic then is employed in feminist writing, whereby dreams and fantasies "represent the possibility of change rather than stasis and entrapment",[98] not as a means of escape, but rather as a thoughtful engagement with an entire cultural tradition and its often static representations of the female figure. Insisting on the relativity and mutability of truth and reality,[99] contemporary feminist writers question established conventions, to help us begin "to see the strangeness of the assumptions of the 'real' world" (*HH*, p.139).

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[94] Albinski, *Women's Utopias*, p.136. Albinski points out that Carter is unusual amongst women writers of dystopian fiction in her literal use of the trope of nuclear war, since others use it predominantly for its "metaphorical function". Carter's fiction is characterised as "dystopian" here in the sense that she writes *against* utopian clichés such as the patriarchal and matriarchal communities featured in *The Passion of New Eve*. See Albinski, p.132.

[95] Walker, p.114.

[96] Walker, p.114. Here Walker cites Roberta Rubenstein's assertion, most appropriate to female gothic, that "the body is...the template for figurative expressions of boundary conceived as enclosure (or its opposite) in temporal as well as spatial terms. Thus rooms, walls, houses...are tropes for inner experience, as are imprisonment, escape, flight, and homelessness". See Rubenstein, *Boundaries of the Self: Gender, Culture, Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

[97] Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.114.

[98] Walker, p.117.

[99] Walker, p.186.

## III. A Generation of Writing

While other women writers such as Atwood and Winterson engage with the traditions of fantastic-realist modes and the configurations of gothic tropes, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon can be grouped together along generational (they were born in 1940, 1937, and 1931 respectively) and national lines.[100] Their fiction is often described in similar terms, yet they have not been considered collectively. Occasionally, an association between two of them will be established through inclusion in an anthology: Carter and Tennant are both represented in *The New Gothic: A Collection of Contemporary Gothic Fiction*,[101] while Carter and Weldon are included in *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy By Women*.[102]

Notably all three writers were greatly influenced by the women's movement of the 1960s, as Tennant herself has noted: "My books have run alongside the women's movement,...the greatest revolution of the twentieth century".[103] Carter definitively announced, "The Women's Movement made me what I am";[104] while certainly Weldon's "first novels coincided with the advent of the women's liberaton movement" and the influence is still strong in her work today.[105] The impact of the women's movement on their writing is borne out by a predominantly feminist view of the world, and moreover one which adopts a sceptical stance toward certain uses of language. Anderson

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[100] Their first novels were published in the same period: Carter's *Shadow Dance* in 1966, Tennant's *The Colour of Rain* in 1962, and Weldon's *The Fat Woman's Joke* in 1967. More specifically in terms of nationality, Tennant and Carter both claim Scottish nationality, while Weldon's higher education took place in St Andrews. Emphasising this identity as a form of otherness, Carter talks of "an Englishness I attempt to deny by claiming Scottish extraction". "Bath, Heritage City" in *Nothing Sacred* (London: Virago, 1982 [*New Society* 1975]), p.75.

[101] Morrow, Bradford and Patrick McGrath (eds), (London: Picador, 1993 [1991]). Carter, "The Merchant of Shadows", pp.179-99; Tennant, "Rigor Beach", pp.231-38. Elsa J. Radcliffe's uneven bibliography, which employs a facile 'grading' system, does not list McCullers, Murdoch, Tennant, or Weldon, and includes five of Carter's novels but with the proviso, in relation to *The Magic Toyshop*, that there is "nothing to commend this story unless one is the type who enjoys looking at freaks"! See *Gothic Novels of the Twentieth Century: An Annotated Bibliography* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1979).

[102] Williams, A. Susan and Richard Glyn Jones (eds), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995). Weldon's "Angel, All Innocence" and Carter's "Peter and the Wolf" are anthologised here.

[103] Tennant, "A Pandora's Box for Writing" in Sellers, *Delighting the Heart*, p.189.

[104] Quoted in Kenyon, *Writing Women*, p.14.

[105] Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.104.

neatly sums up this essential point about their work: Tennant is, she says,

> implicitly critical of the 'received' use of language; like Fay Weldon, for instance, Tennant is acute in her observation of the tired social uses of words to mask realities.[106]

There is of course more than one use of language, and there are many discursive languages; amongst the latter, and explored in their fiction, are both cultural stereotypes of femininity *and* familiar generic traditions.

The gothic tendencies discernible in their novels include the pattern registered by Moers, whereby contemporary writers (for Moers, this meant Plath) "are on the lookout for Gothic predecessors".[107] Allusions, both implicit and explicit, to well-known gothic writers and individual gothic novels (although notably not restricted to *female* predecessors), can be found throughout the fiction of all three women. Familiar gothic tropes derived from the traditional genre are incorporated in their work, yet these women writers also expand the genre through their creation of new gothic material. In sketching the character of their individual styles, and their contributions to the transformation of the gothic, it becomes evident through comparison of the three writers that Carter's writing may usefully be described as intellectual, Tennant's as lyrical, and Weldon's as didactic.

Angela Carter

Tennant describes the context in which women writers select gothic fragments for inclusion in their fiction, declaring the source of many of the themes and images in her own work:

> the point of writing for a woman is to take, magpie-like, anything they please from anywhere, and produce a subversive text out of the scraps; out of patriarchal or any kind of material they can get in their beaks.[108]

This avowed cultural debt is shared by Angela Carter, who chooses an alternative analogy to make the same point: "I found most of my raw material

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[106] Anderson, Carol, "Listening to the Women Talk" in Wallace, Gavin and Randall Stevenson (eds), *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p.180.

[107] Moers, p.97.

[108] Kenyon, *Women Writers Talk*, p.176.

in the lumber room of the Western European imagination."[109] The self-conscious choice of cultural "scraps" described by Carter and Tennant includes the selection of fragments from the old gothic. Appropriately, Levi-Strauss' idea of the *bricoleur* is of someone who is engaged in both intellectual and mythpoeic activity,[110] and this term which Carter adopts to describe herself as a writer,[111] is usefully explicated by Derrida:

> If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur.*[112]

Carter's work accentuates this understanding of literature; she emphasises the common material of cultural imagery and literary texts shared by many readers as well as writers.

The account of her grandmother's house, which was "part of the archaeology of my family life...a living fossil",[113] shares Tennant's recalled sense of generational history and 'depth' in the "archaeological dig" that was her childhood home.[114] Carter's response to the sight of an abandoned house in Ireland is unashamedly gothic: it was a shell, "nowhere for the ghosts to hide. It was like something out of Magritte."[115] Not only does this stand as an example of Carter's tendency to invoke classic visual images, but it also points to a recognisable affinity between the gothic and surrealism.[116] Indeed, the *sur*real cannot be entirely divorced from the magically real, and

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[109] Carter, "Notes From The Frontline" in Wandor, Michelene (ed), *On Gender and Writing* (London: Pandora, 1983), pp.69-77 (p.72).

[110] As Derrida argues in *Writing and Difference*, p.285.

[111] See Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview* (London & New York: Methuen, 1985), p.92.

[112] Derrida, p.285.

[113] Carter, "Time to Tell the Time", *The New Review* 4 (Sept., 1977), pp.41-46 (p.41).

[114] Tennant in Fraser, Antonia (ed), *The Pleasure of Reading* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p.143.

[115] Sage interview in Bradbury, p.190.

[116] Both are heavily indebted to Freud and the uncanny, and both employ the combination of horror and humour. The influence of the 'high' gothic novels on the Surrealist movement was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1.

Carter's debt to Latin American fiction of the twentieth-century is well known.[117] The allure of this genre is not, however, restricted to literary influences, for she asserts a "family talent for magic realism".[118]

Recounting her development as both a reader and writer, Carter indicates the resonance for her of the gothic tradition, which she catalogues in the following way: "mirrors; the externalized self; forsaken castles; haunted forests; forbidden sexual objects."[119] Her attraction to the tales of Poe and Hoffman are borne out in her own short fiction such as *The Bloody Chamber* and *Black Venus* collections, which both include gothic tales.[120] Although she argues for the particular effectiveness of the short form (in apparent agreement with commentators on the form of the gothic tale), Carter nevertheless distinguishes between Poe's "profane" and "exaggerated" gothic which "ignores the value systems of our institutions", and, writing which discloses the relation of "everyday experience" and a "system of imagery derived from subterranean areas behind [that] everyday experience".[121] An important distinction for feminist writers who address these "value systems", this also acts as an account of her own practice, since Carter construes her return to England from Japan as an arrival in a new place and a new time - "We live in Gothic times", she intones - where and when "to understand and interpret is the main thing".[122] Such an intention is, for Janet Wolff, a quintessentially postmodernist trait, in its "commitment...to engage critically with contemporary culture".[123] This exhortation to examine cultural structures obviously carries particular resonance for women, for whom

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[117] See "Notes From The Frontline", in Wandor, p.76. Carter also comments on the influence of Alejo Carpentier which preceded her aquaintance with the novels of Garcia Marquez, see Haffenden, p.81.

[118] Carter, "Time to Tell the Time", p.41.

[119] Carter, Afterword, *Fireworks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp.132-33.

[120] Her story "The Lady of the House of Love" appears in Baldick's *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*.

[121] *Fireworks*, p.133.

[122] Carter, *Fireworks*, pp.132-33.

[123] Wolff, Janet, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.96.

"investigating the social fictions that regulate our lives"[124] becomes an important political activity.

Carter provides a synopsis of the gothic's operation in contemporary women's fiction when she declares her own reasons for using the genre. Taken from Leslie Fiedler's influential survey of the genre in contemporary fiction, the epigraph to *Heroes and Villains* reads: "The Gothic mode is essentially a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of grotesqueness."[125] Just as her novels are seen to be "parodying the stuff of Leavis's great tradition...in a postmodernist perspective",[126] so the gothic as a monument of western European literary tradition is subjected to this subversive treatment. Through this kind of exaggeration, Carter's fiction questions the ahistorical status of myth; applied to genre too, her use of parody exposes the gothic as cliché.

If we accept the argument that the evolution of the gothic did not occur along the lines of a shift of emphasis from 'terror' to 'horror', but rather involved a movement "away from didacticism and toward a speculative use of ideas",[127] it is possible to site Carter's work as the paragon of this development in gothic writing. Employing the gothic as a vehicle for such intellectual ventures not only confirms the view that new demands are now placed on the reader of gothic literature, but also typifies Carter's individual use of the gothic, imbricated as it is with twentieth-century theory including the "fantasies of philosophy".[128] As Elaine Jordan points out, "there is hardly a theoretical debate of the past twenty years that she does not subject

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[124] Carter, "Notes from the Front Line" in Wandor, p.70.

[125] This quotation is borrowed from Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984 [1960]), p.421, following discussion of the treatment of incest in Melville, Poe, and Faulkner. Carter also includes Fiedler's seminal book in the bibliography of *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 1979).

[126] Sage in Bradbury, p.192.

[127] Lewis, "Mysterious Laughter", p.314.

[128] Elaine Jordan emphasises the intellectual aspects of Carter's writing; her novels imaginatively explore ideas and traditions as diverse as "pornography, the Gothic, fairy tales, horror films, boys' imperial adventure stories, [and] anthropological idylls according to Rousseau or Levi-Strauss" (here in reference to *Dr Hoffman*). See "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions" in Anderson, Linda (ed), *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), pp.19-40 (p.34).

to imaginative exploration."[129] Carter herself has said that "to explore ideas...is the same thing as telling stories since, for me, a narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms."[130] Yet the baroque imagery, a conspicuous pleasure in language itself, and myriad references to the art forms of Western culture, all paramount in her fiction, immediately remedy any misapprehension that Carter's writing is prosaic in its intellectual engagement. Among these characteristics, and particularly relevant to a consideration of the gothic in her work, is an acute awareness of the visual impact of many of the tropes that she employs, the "decorative, ornamental functions" she finds not just in the images of literature, but in "paintings and sculptures and the movies and folklore and heresies", too.[131]

Associated with this love of the decorative, Carter's fiction exhibits a fascination for a 'primal scene' of the gothic: the heroine in the white wedding gown threatened by "the gothic excitement of rape".[132] This configuration, presented in an acutely stylised fashion, appears repeatedly throughout Carter's novels and shorter fiction, and is often overlaid with non-gothic images from "paintings and sculptures and the movies". As in the case of the figure of Ophelia, so common in the iconography of western literature and fine art, the reproduction of this gothic heroine is compelling for Carter as a form of cultural and feminist catharsis, since the figure is "the icon of pathos you must exorcise again and again".[133] The writer's constant return to material which is captivating, but must also be repulsed, is akin to the allure of the 'freak'; Carter's "curious room",[134] inevitably a personal and a cultural space, is full of such vivid and totemic figures.

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[129] Jordan, "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions" in Anderson, pp.19-40 (p.34). Flora Alexander might interpret such inquisitiveness as highly suited to the gothic genre: "Carter and Tennant have some of this restless, questioning impulse that characterizes much of Gothic fiction." Alexander, *Contemporary Women Novelists*, p.62.

[130] Carter, Preface, *Come Unto These Yellow Sands* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1985).

[131] Carter, "Notes From the Frontline" in Wandor, p.74.

[132] Jordan, in Anderson, p.29.

[133] See Sage, Lorna, *Angela Carter* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p.33.

[134] "Alice in Prague *or* The Curious Room" in *American Ghosts & Old World Wonders* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p.121.

In "The Loves of Lady Purple", the "Oriental Venus" moves between human and inhuman states, initially transforming herself into a marionette: "She abrogated her humanity. She became nothing but wood and hair."[135] Carter presents issues of female self-determination and desire in this magic realist story of transformation and vampirism; when the protagonist sees "herself [as] her own replica" (p.34), we can detect Carter's consistent preoccupations with metaphor and materialism. It is the province of the fair where "the grotesque is the order of the day" (p.27) which permits this contemplation of identity and a suspension of disbelief. More pronounced than McCullers' misshapen grotesques, the "dwarfs, alligator men, bearded ladies and giants" (p.27) of the sideshow in "The Loves of Lady Purple" and the "Japanese dwarfs", "dancing Albinos", and ubiquitous "alligator man" (p.98) in *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* together prefigure the circus arena for the introduction of the *aerialiste*, Fevvers, in a later novel *Nights at the Circus*. Half myth, half woman, Fevvers embodies the dichotomies of image/body and transcendence/immanence which provide the critical focus for a reading of the female figures in the chapters to follow. In her protagonist, a "goddess of in-between states" (p.81), Carter locates the issues of female identity at the centre of an arena already alive with indistinctions between the natural and the constructed: the sideshow. Through a unique vision of the grotesque and the freakish, Carter articulates her feminist politics and her realisation of the gothic.

Emma Tennant

Emma Tennant's formative years were spent in a Victorian Gothic house in Scotland, and it was here that she sat in the attic - "the foolish, crenellated summit of the place"[136] - reading a vast collection of history and fiction. She perceived the house as made of layers of books, where ghosts of previous inhabitants had accumulated in the many rooms (a kind of "sedimentation" analogous to Jameson's reading of genre). Situated at the

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[135] *Fireworks*, p.34.

[136] Tennant in Fraser, Antonia (ed), *The Pleasure of Reading* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p.144.

edge of the Ettrick Forest, the house shared the setting of James Hogg's gothic novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824); she felt "the power of Hogg's imagination in the hills and woods and streams that enclosed the house".[137] There is a ghostliness invoked in her account of the books she read there, as if she remembers them as presences of the past. The influence of her family home was, then, both textual *and* physical:

> When I was older I would take books from the sitting-room, lined with dark green bound volumes of the Brontës, Peacock and Stevenson. But by then the Gothic atmosphere of the place may have already permeated me more than I knew.[138]

The details included in her brief account of this seminal period for her as a writer add a personal, and rather lyrical, dimension to a strictly textual gothic influence: she recalls "a floor covering of dead bees" in the attic, and her search for the "rich, gleaming black flower" of Dumas' *The Black Tulip* at the entrance to the garden "between two yew trees".[139]

Her list of favourite books attests to Tennant's interest in myth (Graves), magic realism (Schulz and Garcia Marquez), and the gothic (Hogg and Stevenson). Common to all three writers, these literary fields carry a collective political resonance when employed to remark on women's experience or the history of representation of women. Carter's characterisation of living in modern Britain as "living in Gothic times", is echoed by Tennant's explanation for a shift in style in British writing generally. Observing the direct influence of Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* with its "plot of weather and moods" on her own *Wild Nights*, Tennant broadens the political implications of the popularity of magic realism amongst writers:

> We felt at the same sort of a level as East European countries and South American dictatorships. When you cannot tell there's any real *terra firma* writers go into surrealism or into allegory to

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[137] Fraser, p.143.

[138] Tennant in Fraser, *The Pleasure of Reading*, pp.143-47.

[139] Fraser, pp.145, 144. In Tennant's description of the garden, as a metaphor for her own imaginative development which was deeply affected by a sense of the gothic at that time, the trees mark an imaginative 'path' similar to their use in Plath's poetry. It is not easy to ignore the totemic value of yew trees for Plath: in "The Moon and the Yew Tree", the tree "has a Gothic shape" and its "message" is "blackness - blackness and silence". (ll.15, 28) A symbol of sadness, the yew is a complex image in that as an evergreen it signifies deathlessness, but is also redolent of death as its leaves and berries are poisonous.

> show the changeable, frightening, insecure and topsy-turvy world in which everybody lives.[140]

She suggests, then, that writers like Schulz and Garcia Marquez furnished a generic model which was ideal for the expression of social discontent and disorientation, which in turn encompassed feminist unease with "the social fictions" Carter identified in the determination of women's lives.

Tennant's significant inclusion of Plath's *Ariel* on this same list of favourite books strongly suggests that her sense of the gothic, originally Scottish and demonic in orientation, is also coloured by Plath's specifically female-oriented vision and her imagery of the body.[141] Moreover, there are numerous references to Plath in her novels: in *The Magic Drum*, for example, the characters of Muriel and Jason Cole are modelled on Plath and Hughes, and in reference to Muriel's attempted suicide, both Plath and her contemporary Anne Sexton are mentioned explicitly. (*MD*, pp.8, 40)

Other intertextual references contribute to the gothic picture of Tennant's fiction. A memory of Poe's work - Tennant was fond of reciting "The Bells" when young[142] - is fictionalised in references to his gothic in her novels. Thus, the narrator of *The Magic Drum* invokes another of his poems: "'Ulalume,' I said, as if some schoolgirl memory of Poe...had suddenly come back to me" (*MD*, p.137). This single word encapsulates the disillusionment experienced by one who has been deceived and who then recognises the truth behind a mystery.[143] Her novel *Wild Nights* takes its title from Emily Dickinson's poem; the poet herself appears as a "ghostly figure of white peacock" in *The Magic Drum* (p. 63); while in the same novel, Jason Cole quotes Dickinson to comment on Catherine Treger's worry that she might be obliterated by the snow: "The chill - the stupor - and the letting go", a line

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[140] Haffenden, p.286; Kenyon, *Women Writers Talk*, p.180.

[141] Tennant also expresses a kind of professional sympathy with Plath in her comments on the restrictive conditions experienced by some women writers. See Tennant, "A Strong Story-telling Impulse" in Sellers, p.27.

[142] Fraser, p.145.

[143] In Poe's poem, "Ulalume - A Ballad", the speaker is led by the beauty of a planet to the location of his beloved's burial place. In Tennant's novel, Catherine has been misled by the story of Muriel's sister, before discovering that such a person never existed and that she has involuntarily reacted to their story just as Jason and Jane Cole had intended.

which subsequently summarises the novel's entire plot in Catherine's mind.[144] Following this deathly omen, Jason Cole is seen as the figure of Maxim de Winter in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, "with words of hatred for his dead wife hanging behind him in the air". (p.64)

The self-conscious fictionality of life in the Big Houses featured in her novels is an indication too of the gothic-as-game in Tennant's novels. One such case, in which "the house was like a giant doll's house where the plaster food, once served by the children, is tidied away into a cupboard until the next game" (*HH*, p.110), provides an example of what we might regard as a postmodernist stance toward the gothic, now devitalised as a genre through an emphasis on its own constructedness. Tennant herself recognises the multiple possibilities of contemporary gothic. In her view, the gothic is a form which "has blossomed - or degenerated - into a successful genre",[145] thereby employing a 'gothic' verb to describe simultaneously the formalisation and stasis of a homogeneous "gothic", *and* the experimental fragmentation and self-consciously seasoned aspects which make the genre "successful" today. Her twofold participation in its development involves a modernisation - replacing the old gothic document with the modern answering machine in *Two Women of London*, for example - and feminist revision, in which the aim is "to transpose the exclusively male world" of a classic gothic text by regarding it "in feminist terms".[146]

Tennant's Scottish identity informs her literary education - for her, reading is "tied inextricably to place"[147] - and the choice of setting and theme (often gothic) in her own compositions. In *Two Women of London*, the landscape is itself a record of fictional settings, where a Scottish hill holds memories of tales of "*doppelgängers* and people metamorphosed to beasts...in the depths of the woods". (*TWL*, p.85) An atmospheric scene is furnished by

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[144] *MD*, pp.63, 138. The line comes from Dickinson's "After great pain, a formal feeling comes": "First - Chill - then Stupor - then the letting go". *Emily Dickinson: The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975 [1970]), p.162.

[145] Tennant, *The ABC of Writing*, p.56. She also warns of "the inevitable consequences of formula writing, ie. becoming indistinguishable from other writers and therefore invisible."

[146] Tennant, in Sellers, *Delighting the Heart*, p.75.

[147] Fraser, p.143.

a "summer storm in Scotland" in the "Editor's Note" to *Robina*, while hints at a sense of forboding are phrased by the "heather seemed darker". (*R*, p.44) In this novel, Tennant also introduces the historical/Shakespearean story of Macbeth to colour the location of the Castle "where it was said that the old Scottish king was murdered and where the wicked Lady Macbeth is still seen to walk in her sleep" (p.44); the violence and ghostly presences of this story overlap the plot of the fearful heroine trying to escape Prince P. who resembles "a Stag in the Highlands" (p.29) in this mock picaresque. Furthermore, the heroine's national identity itself becomes a euphemism for the girl's plight of sexual inexperience as "a Schoolgirl fresh out of Scotland". (p.111) At the close of the novel, the consequences of this transgression of boundaries are made plain, since it was venturing "South of the Border" that brought her into trouble; the opposition of Scotland/England as a relation of cultural, religious, and national alterity, means that England here represents a geographical equivalent of the forbidden rooms into which the heroine's curiosity takes her. The use of italicised place names in *Robina*, as well as belonging to the novel's mock eighteenth-century form, emphasises this sense of unknown territory. Tennant employs the dichotomy of Scotland and England - a contrast not unfamiliar to gothic literature[148] - at the centre of her gothic novella, *Queen of Stones*, to underscore the degree of estrangement felt amongst a group of schoolgirls (see Chapter 3).

Finally, two principal tropes which recur throughout Tennant's work stand out as innovations in her use of the gothic: tapestry and the seaside. The first represents a matrix in which figures are somehow caught, a form of imprisonment peculiarly domestic in character.[149] This image is central to many of her novels, including *Woman Beware Woman*, in which the

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[148] 'Otherness' in gothic literature has carried a variety of meanings throughout its history, including "Tudor, Druid, English, German, and even Oriental", as well as feudal and Catholic. See Sage, Victor (ed), *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), p.17.

[149] Tennant's interest in textiles is not solely literary; she has also practised the craft of pictorial rug-making since 1980. Indeed, she has been described as "a leader of the current revival" of this art, according to the Editor's Preface to Tennant, *Rag Rugs of England and America* (London: Walker Books, 1992), p.11. This craft has had a significant effect on the way Tennant sees the world; rug-making, she says, has "sharpened my perception of a thousand and one details", while her "painting and rug hooking complement and influence each other". See Davies, Ann and Emma Tennant, *Hooked Rugs* (Museum Quilts, 1995), pp.13,127.

protagonist-narrator, whose perceptions are gradually revealed to be unstable, imagines herself to be living in a fictional text: "as if I were sewn into a drama...a moving tapestry". (*WBW*, p.99) The wallhanging in question depicts a "scene of ritualized violence, of torn beasts and spears and the stain of red woven blood" (*WBW*, p.156), and this becomes an allegory for the passion of murder and obsessional love which form the conventional part of the narrative.[150] In *Alice Fell*, the figures in the tapestry have become fixed: "The Blue Women had been such a time without freedom that their faces and limbs, once sewn in supple lines, had grown stiff and brittle." (p.175) As depictions of female figures this stasis is significant, since it suggests the strict definitions and 'containment' of representation in which the "supple lines" of life are repressed in an inanimate medium, which then in turn reflects the inertia in the house. In the short story, "Philomela", it is a tapestry, given to the narrator, Procne, which discloses the horrific narrative in which her husband Tereus has raped and mutilated her sister Philomela.[151]

An eeriness equal to that evoked by the tapestries in Tennant's work is conveyed through myriad references to the sea. Scenes associated with, or located at a littoral site invariably involve some form of violence; this is coupled with descriptions of bleached stones and bones alluding to death, depictions of an underwater realm expressive of a dark subconscious entrapment, and accounts of female madness induced by incest. In *Tess*, a young girl's sexual initiation is intimately associated with the sea in a

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[150] The tapestry in this novel strongly suggests the hunting scene in *The Hunt* by the fifteenth-century Italian painter Paolo Uccello, which depicts a dark forest into which figures on horseback disappear. Yet, it is also worth noting that Tennant mentions a rug design called "A Knight Riding Through The Forest" drawn by Winifred Nicholson (the painter Ben Nicholson's wife). Davies and Tennant, *Hooked Rugs*, p.64. The tale of "The Hind in the Wood" included in the *Beauty and the Beast Picture Book* (London & New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1901), pictures by Walter Crane, engraved and printed by Edmund Evans - to which Tennant refers in *The House of Hospitalities* (p.143) - depicts the princess sitting before a tapestry or painting depicting the hunt of the hind in the forest which actually takes place later in the story. Carter too describes a forest in terms of a tapestry, here "made out of the substance of the forest itself", and similarly in terms of a location of sexual transgression, in "Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest". (*Fireworks*, p.58)

[151] Tennant, Emma (ed), *Bananas* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1977), pp.102-10. It is worth noting that, in her children's story *Miss Z, The Dark Young Lady* (London: Heineman, 1970), Carter too employs the image of a tapestry: the blue-green river turns out to have the "texture of tapestry" (p.18); and the story ends in "a night-time country of tapestry colours" (p.21).

disturbing scene in which a stone is pushed into her vagina.[152] Akin to Carter's "sea-gone wet doll" of Mary Anne washed up dead, "wreathed and garlanded in seaweed and shells" (*DrH*, p.61), the corpse in "Rigor Beach" is decorated to look like a beach scene itself - indeed the title of her sinister story concisely illustrates the seaside/death relation. In a concurrence of both tropes in *Woman Beware Woman*, Moura's paintings and embroidery are composed of sea colours, thus connecting her to a sense of mysterious doom. (*WBW*, p.58) Often the sea acts as an unidentified primal force threatening to engulf the domestic world; the sea invades the house at the centre of *Alice Fell*, until it is transformed into a place full of "yellowing seaweed fans, chipped shells and general flotsam...[where] sometimes, from the roof of sodden weed, a water-snake arched, and fell." (p.196) This lapse into a world of fantastic otherness finally signifies the proximity of madness that is often central to Tennant's novels.

Fay Weldon

Weldon has often been characterised as a didactic writer; like Carter, who engages with theoretical debates, she wants "to lead people to consider and explore new ideas".[153] Not surprisingly then, her educational interests - economics and psychology - frequently inform, and coincide in, the depiction of her fictional heroines.[154] Weldon's approach to writing may be regarded as metatextual in the sense that her work also contextualises what Sage calls the "matriarchal realism" favoured by many feminist writers.[155] Her affiliation to feminism is evident throughout her writing, from her first novels which "coincided with the advent of the women's liberation movement" to her story, "The Year of the Green Pudding", which concludes a collection entitled

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[152] Tennant, *Tess* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p.17. Further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

[153] Kenyon, Olga, *Women Novelists Today*, p.110. Lorna Sage also comments on her "didactic design". See Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.155.

[154] Kenyon believes that a "distinctive ideology of the 1970s", based on the economics Weldon studied at St Andrews University, is evident in her fiction. *Women Novelists Today*, p.119.

[155] Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.156.

*More to Life than Mr Right: Stories for Young Feminists.*[156] In accordance with a crucial focus of women's studies, Weldon's feminism addresses the distinction between nature and culture as formative influences on female identity. Since the gothic genre often centers on assaults of the natural, her feminist inquiry into its transgressions extends the genre's imagery. Weldon's location of such transgressions is often the world of medical science; in *The Cloning of Joanna May*, for instance, multiple versions of one woman are created by a devious husband/scientist, while *She-Devil* recounts the horrors of cosmetic surgery (discussed in Chapter 5).

Extravagant metaphors delivered in rather flat language regularly occur in Weldon's prose. In one example, she embodies what is essentially an emotional conflict:

> Female bodies lie strewn across the battle-field,...gaunt dead arms upflung towards the sky. It was an exhilarating battle, don't think it wasn't. The sun shone brightly at the height of it, armour glinted, sparks flew.[157]

In this passage violence is presented in a camp inflation of its actual subject: female social rivalry. Her writing does not share the lyricism which can often be found in novels by the other two writers; as is often noted, her experience as a copywriter has shaped her style as a novelist, leading to significant breaks between paragraphs and short, choppy prose.

Like Tennant, who notes the "terrifying split between the privileged and the deprived" in contemporary society,[158] Weldon pursues the concern about class divisions as a recurrent theme in her fiction. Her contribution to the writing of the television drama, *Upstairs, Downstairs*, is evidence of this interest, and also later appears in novels such as *The Shrapnel Academy* in which the narrative identifies the threat within the snow-bound academy as "the greater enemy, that is to say Downstairs".[159] The dissimilarities

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[156] Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.104; (London: Fontana Lions, 1987).

[157] Weldon, *Female Friends* (London: Pan Books, 1977 [1975]), p.236. Further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

[158] Tennant, in Sellers, *Delighting the Heart*, p.75.

[159] Weldon, *The Shrapnel Academy* (London: Coronet, 1987 [1986]), p.100. Further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

between upper and lower classes cast as a conflict between civilisation and barbarity (p.165) lends the story of a British household the spirit of a gothic drama. Her novel plays out the implicit tensions in a class-divided community to their 'logical' conclusion, with Acorn's impulse "to kill, cook and eat, and thus incorporate and control the evil" embodied by "Upstairs". (p.145)

The black humour on which this plot relies is the most prominent characteristic of Weldon's writing in general. Recognised as a significant aspect of women's writing in the 1960s and 1970s, black humour stems from a critical view of the world and is an important feature in contemporary gothic.[160] There are times, advises Weldon, that "terrible things happen, and it is impossible to keep a straight face".[161] Regina Gagnier argues that there is a distinct form of women's humour, one which is relatively consistent throughout the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, and concludes that "what women perceive as humorous is...the very terms of their confinement", and thus enact an imaginative process of counteraction.[162] In a "criticism of a set of cultural and intertextual frames", the sense of humour in women's writing is, Gagnier insists, "metasemiotic" in its confrontation with other cultural codes.[163] This is directly relevant to the structures of Weldon's novels, in which a stark sense of humour runs through a step-by-step dismantling of familiar codes, particularly those which impinge on women's lives. Certainly, this brand of humour endows Weldon's writing

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[160] Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.107. In defining "black humour" one cannot ignore the OED (1989, 2nd ed) entry referring to the mediaeval humours said to govern the state of the body, including "black cholera" or black humour associated with melancholy. In a brief article on the subject of humour, Weldon describes two forms: one which is "dismissive" and distancing, and another (preferred by her) which encompasses pain, so that the latter mediates between humour and horror. "Black" humour then does not entirely detach itself from the experience of pain, melancholy, or horror. Weldon, "Towards a humorous view of the universe", *Women's Studies* 15 (1988), pp.309-11.

[161] "Love and Truth in Bad Times", Suzanne Lowry interviews Weldon, *Sunday Times* (19 September 1982), p.38.

[162] Gagnier, Regina, "Between Women: a cross-class analysis of status and anarchic humor", *Women's Studies* 15 (1988), pp.135-48 (p.144). As the title suggests, Gagnier pursues the differences between humour written by middle- and working-class women. Her remarks regarding the greater number of "frames" which middle-class women may challenge provides an interesting point of departure for a potential study of these differences in the contemporary period. The middle-class status of the writers under discussion here cannot be overlooked when identifying the diverse cultural "frames" to which their writing refers.

[163] Gagnier, p.139.

with a gothic tenor, for, as Carter herself has pointed out, the gothic's "only humor is black humor [*sic*]".[164]

The sometimes banal surfaces in Weldon's fiction often barely conceal cruelties typical of older gothic narratives such as incest and murder. In *The Shrapnel Academy*, the surface narrative of the evening meal is interrupted by an incongruous vision in which Victor suddenly imagines a figure behind Bella: "invisible at her elbow, flapping unseen wings, was a host of sinewy vampires with heavy claws and bloody beaks, which were about to tear him to shreds". (pp.160-61) The character's perception of a female threat (Bella is the *femme fatale* of the story) acquires the metaphorical embodiment of the vampire, in Weldon's use of gothic stereotype. In this same novel, we also find family madness and the allusion to rape. (pp.156, 168) In her discussion of the novel *Remember Me*, Sage acknowledges that Weldon "slides over into the idiom of haunted houses, possession, doubles and devilish inversions with mischievous ease".[165]

Like Tennant and Carter, Weldon engages with both traditional and experimental forms of the gothic. Its structures and metaphors are readily identifiable and act as a shorthand in the outlining of characters, such as Ruth in *She-Devil* who is compared to Frankenstein. A truism of gothic writing generally, and not just confined to the genre in women's writing over the last thirty years, it can be said that "Gothic conventions provide a handy framework for accomodating [*sic*] characters who are dismembered, obsessed, imaginatively homeless."[166] This ready-made quality in turn contributes to a reading of the generic fragments within a postmodernist rubric. The sense of pronounced 'textuality', and intertextuality, means that gothic devices in Weldon's work often "announce their own flamboyant and ramshackle fictionality".[167] Reminiscent of Tennant's statement that the genre has "blossomed - and degenerated", this characterisation of the gothic as both

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[164] *Fireworks*, p.133.

[165] Sage, Lorna, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.157.

[166] Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.158.

[167] Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.158.

stimulating and antiquated also points to the paradox of its appeal. Thus, Weldon's use of highly-wrought gothic patterns is comparable to a practice of Carter's in that, as Sage says, she "makes novelistic conventions themselves the protagonists" of her fiction;[168] the gothic appears as both subject and background in her writing.

In addition, a very modernised gothic emerges in Weldon's novels, compiled from ventures into science fiction, and contributes to her specific innovation in a use of the grotesque: to make the monstrous postmodern. In suggesting that *Life and Loves of a She-Devil* is "too far-fetched", Kenyon seems to expect a strict realism from Weldon to accompany the novelist's feminist message.[169] The themes of surgical reconstruction and genetic multiplication, however, are typical of Weldon's preoccupation with identifying the fantastic as it can be seen in the real world. These themes in turn furnish Weldon with possible tropes on which to hang theoretical issues: a Kristevan reading, for instance, might be invited by Joanna May's statement, "What I am is what I'm not" (*JM*, p.289).[170] Disjunctions between self and cultural images, articulated by Weldon's female characters, are explicit: "it was me haunting myself", concludes Marjorie in *Female Friends* (p.230) in a Plathian moment of perception. Such a debt to the literary tradition of the Double is developed as it provides a means of reading culture through a sense of the gothic: "perhaps women have shadowed characters in any case?"[171] Weldon's readers, like Carter's and Tennant's, are forced to consider "the deleterious effects which cultural and media images of women have on all of us",[172] which result in such 'hauntings' by cultural stereotypes.

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[168] Sage, Lorna, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.158.

[169] Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.124.

[170] See, for example, Kristeva's "Woman Can Never Be Defined", in which she claims that "a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong in the order of *being*...so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it'." Marks, Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds), *New French Feminisms* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1981 [1980]), p.137.

[171] Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.157.

[172] Kenyon, *Women Novelists Today*, p.127.

A GENERATION

The textual shapes of the gothic which one discovers in the fiction of Angela Carter, Emma Tennant, and Fay Weldon are unique to their individual styles of writing. Yet considering these women as a generation of writers proves fruitful in an assessment of the contemporary gothic, as some striking similarities in their representations of the gothic are revealed. When Hume delineated two generational groups in his discussion of the evolution of the gothic, he rightly stated that there is no such thing as "*the* Gothic imagination"; rather, there are many diverse manifestations and interpretations of the genre. Accordingly, in identifying a generation of British women writers here, it is worth noting Hume's caution in regard to his own choice of groups of writers:

> Each has his [*sic*] own distinctive characteristics and purposes. By demonstrating common ground the critic is entitled to discuss these or others, but to pretend that *any* resulting groups possesses an independent existence is ridiculous.[173]

Moreover, remembering that the fantastic and fantasy play central roles in the writing of gothic, one should bear in mind the nature of the material with which the writers work: "Fantasy is never individual: it is *group fantasy*."[174]

Several common aspects of their writing point to a shared interest in the gothic. While there is not sufficient space here to discuss all of these aspects at length, this section provides a brief sketch of the most prominent among them, which also appear throughout subsequent chapters. The gothic belongs to a matrix of western European literary traditions which informs the work of all three writers. Their group fantasy comprises a kaleidoscope of familiar images; collectively, it constitutes a "powerhouse of the marvellous where all its clanking, dull, stage machinery [i]s kept". (*DrH*, p.201) Sometimes faded and "dull", sometimes striking in appearance, the most

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[173] Hume, Robert D., "'Gothic Versus Romantic': A Rejoinder", p.274.

[174] Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Captialism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984 [1972]), p.30. Discussing their critique of Lacan, Richard Harland argues that Deleuze and Guattari "superstructuralize" the Unconscious. Harland, *Superstructuralism: The Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (London & New York: Methuen, 1987), p.171. In parallel to Jameson's concerns, they argue that "the Unconscious is not individual, generated out of private family experience, but socially generated out of collective public experience."

significant of this "machinery" in a discussion of the gothic includes intertextual references to gothic novels and gothic imagery, the use of fairytales (especially their more gothic features), an emphasis on the visual, and a colour scheme of white, red, and black.[175] A short discussion of these intratextual themes and tropes concludes with a focus on the figure of the female body, as the iconography of this figure, highlighted through an emphasis on the visual, in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon is imbricated with gothic imagery.

Echoes of the Gothic

In addition to the occasional reference to the fictional props of "Gothic turrets" (*H&V*, p.31), "the gargoyles, the monsters, the leering griffons" (*Tess*, p.81), and signs written in "Gothic script" (*H&V*, p.50), direct allusions to the genre more often take the form of intertextual references. Indeed, it has been suggested that the 'intertextual fantastic' (revisions of specific pre-texts) itself "frequently involves Gothic or near-fantastic texts".[176] Examples include novels which re-work other novels, such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and novel fragments or short stories based on traditional fairy tales, as in Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* or Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. Tennant frequently builds a novel from the plot structure of another; her novel *Two Women of London* loosely follows Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

It is true that many of the writers mentioned by Moers as rightful gothic predecessors to contemporary women writers do appear in the novels under discussion. The young girl's response to the Erl-King in Carter's short story is clearly reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862):

> Eat me, drink me; thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden, I go back and back to him...He spreads out a goblin feast of fruit for me,

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[175] The writers' work also shares certain characters. Carter and Tennant both have novels which include the figure of "New Eve": *The Passion of New Eve* and *Sisters and Strangers*. In each case, New Eve enters the sea at the close of the novel, enacting a feminist gesture in terms of their respective plots. A black Mother Goddess also appears in both books. The Tennant novel meanwhile seems to repeat aspects of the plot of Weldon's *She-Devil*, exchanging Ruth and Mary for Lilith and Eve.

[176] Cornwell, p.153.

such appalling succulence.[177]

The grotesque gluttony of the Rossetti poem is united in Carter's story with the instructions for an inquisitive child in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. The unsettling combination of sexual appetite and childish curiosity is one which Carter's fiction manipulates, evoking a sense of anxiety so characteristic of fairy tale and gothic.

Harriet Linkin, meanwhile, regards "The Erl-King" as an instance of Carter's "pastiche of nineteenth-century poetry and poetics", before Carter performs a subversion of the "male" poetic vision.[178] This accentuated sense of the textual is further evident in the inclusion of references to Wordsworth and Blake in Carter's story; a combination which shows the encoded character of our response to Nature, especially as it is negotiated through Romantic texts. In this short story, the heroine's knowledge of *texts* means that she recognises the wood through which she walks: "She knows it because she has read it."[179] An emphasis on 'reading' the natural as a construct, mimics the writers' attention to the textual character of our experience.

When one looks at the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon to determine "the pattern of picking and choosing your literary predecessors",[180] it quickly becomes apparent that such a pattern in their work is largely dependent on gothic associations. Hence, we may judge allusions to Rossetti, like the one above, with this in mind.[181] Grounds for this inclination may be found in Sedgwick's recommendation that we "look to the Gothic for explorations of the position of women in relation to the changing

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[177] Carter, "The Erl King", *The Bloody Chamber*, pp.84-90 (p.89). The lines in Rossetti's poem are: "Eat me, drink me, love me" (l.471), and "Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden" (l.484). *The Works of Christina Rossetti* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1995).

[178] Linkin, Harriet Kramer, "Isn't it Romantic?: Angela Carter's Bloody Revision of the Romantic Aesthetic in 'The Erl-King'", *Contemporary Literature* 35 (Summer, 1994), p.318. This reading glosses over the complication of the "male vision" being written by a woman.

[179] Linkin, "Isn't it Romantic?", p.314.

[180] Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.160.

[181] Gilbert and Gubar suggest that "Goblin Market" and "From House to Home", Rossetti's most successful works, "are essentially gothic/romantic tales" in poetic form. *Madwoman in the Attic*, p.582.

shapes of patriarchal domination."[182]

Perhaps the trope most resonant of the old gothic for these contemporary writers is that of a female character's experience of incarceration, desire, and violence in relation to an overbearing male character. Allusions to *Rebecca* and to Emily Dickinson (and by association, her "Master" poems) reproduce and support this paradigm in the contemporary fiction, as does the conflation of Adam, Eve, and Lilith with Rochester, Jane, and Bertha in *Sisters and Strangers*, when storyteller Grandmother Dummer warns her young listeners, "Never forget the fury of a first wife abandoned."[183] The reference to *Dracula* in *The Cloning of Joanna May* (p.147) humorously explains the origins of her replication: her husband "dug his yellow fangs into Joanna's neck just above her genteel string of pearls" to collect a scrap of flesh from which to clone her. His intentions are to devise a wife according to his own specifications: "I'll grow you into what I want", he tells her. (p.144) Many of these gothic antecedents then make their reappearance in abridged form, as Carter, Tennant, and Weldon invoke an underlying pattern of heterosexual desire and patriarchal domination, and thereby 'read' these earlier texts through a perceived sense of commonality.

Other intertextual references to the gothic are more buried in these contemporary texts: descriptions of the wedding dress which Marianne is told to wear may allude to Miss Havisham of Dickens' *Great Expectations*: Marianne watches "the fabric shiver to dust between her fingers", and, once she puts it on, it makes her a "yellowish, drifting, spectral figure".[184] Similarly, one of Tennant's strange gothic tales contains echoes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892); Aunt Maria is seen running around behind the striped wallpaper, while "her chin played chords on the bars that imprisoned her". (*AF*, p.272) These last two images, of the wedding

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[182] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.91.

[183] Tennant, *Sisters and Strangers* (London: Paladin, 1991 [1990]), p.52. Further references are to this edition and are given in the text. *Jane Eyre* is combined with *Jekyll and Hyde* in Tennant's *Two Women of London*, as the figure of Grace Poole is included (p.57).

[184] *H & V*, pp.68-69. Kenyon quotes Carter from a 1984 BBC Radio interview, saying that the old wedding dresses in her novels are "like Miss Haversham's [*sic*]. I always use it ironically when something is about to happen." Kenyon, *Writing Women*, p.16.

dress and the wallpapered room of incarceration, both look back to earlier scenes of the gothic as specifically domestic and to gendered tropes of marital entrapment and isolation. Confirming the writers' interest in the "changing shapes of patriarchal domination", and providing evidence of Jameson's reading of genre, older forms of this pattern are sedimented in these contemporary novels.

Fairy Tales

Introducing the fairy tale motif in Tennant's *Sisters and Strangers*, the narrator announces that the reader will hear "a fairy story for grown-ups" (p.8), while the blind piano tuner in Carter's story "The Bloody Chamber" complains that he thought fairy tales were merely "spooks to scare bad children into good behaviour!" (*BC*, p.33). Each view indicates the kind of transformation of the fairy tale form that these writers undertake; through the inclusion of material "for grown-ups", material which is often latent in the original versions, the tales appear sinister and brutal.[185] While the fairy tale generally supported a sense of a stable social order in the past, as Jackson argues, the manner of their appearance today is not radically different; the fantastic elements of fairy tales "have been constantly re-worked, re-written and re-covered to *serve* rather than to *subvert* the dominant ideology".[186] In response to this cultural saturation, feminists have made fairy tales the focus

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[185] In Carter's Introduction to Walter De La Mare's *Memoirs of a Midget* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), she compares the structure of his novel with that of George MacDonald's Victorian writing for children and Rossetti's "Goblin Market" "in which the latent content diverges so markedly from the superficial text that their self-designation as 'fairytales' seems to function as a screen, or cover, designed to disarm the reader", p.xi. The comparison with Rossetti here is especially pertinent to Carter's own treatment of fairytales in her story "The Bloody Chamber", in their similar presentation of both childish curiosity and sexual and material lust in the same text.

[186] Jackson, Rosemary, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p.175. This accords with Tennant's gender identification of the tales as we know them; in her novel, *Tess*, the tales are characterised as masculine in their *written* form. See pp.48-49.

of critical attention as well as literary experimentation.[187] Indeed these two arenas of writing are dedicated to the same aim in relation to the tales as Kay Stone has demonstrated, when they seek to explore the formation of female identity through the tales' characterisations of women.[188] To this end, critics of the fairy tale have proposed that the tales must be "made strange to us again if we are to respond to the unique images of our own imagination", and that by "effectively alienating the adults from their fairy-tale dreams through perverted fairy-tale motifs...this shock therapy might recall the emancipatory goals of fairy tales".[189]

While the pervasive references to fairy tales in their work belong to this project of revision, it is also the manner in which the stories coincide with aspects of the conventional gothic plot which is of greatest interest here. Since fairy tales have acted as paradigms for cultural relations, in disrupting the fairy tale form, it is the very "basis of traditional genres" which becomes unsettled.[190] Consequently, the subversion of the fairy tale in feminist fiction normally occurs in tandem with the subversion of the gothic. The captivity plot of Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Rapunzel, and Beauty and the Beast, along with the violence featured (yet casually treated) in some of these

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[187] For feminist writing of the 1950s and 1960s, the process of socialisation was a central issue; Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir used generalised descriptions of fairy-tale characters. In the 1970s Marcia R. Lieberman considered the portrayal of female characters in the tales as stereotypical and dismissive. More currently, Karen Rowe, amongst others, has challenged Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalytic study of the tales as flawed in its failure to address issues of gender. One example of his interpretation of the tales which feminist critics find problematic is his view on the ubiquitous trope of marriage: "The permanent union of...a prince and princess symbolizes the integration of the disparate aspects of the personality...achieving a harmony of the theretofore discordant tendencies of the male and female principles". Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.120. Rowe instead emphasises the effect of these matrimonial endings as "perpetuating the patriarchal *status quo*". Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales", *Women's Studies* 6 (1979), pp.237-57 (p.251). See also de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949); Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963); and Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale", *College English* 34 (1972), pp.383-95.

[188] Stone, Kay, "Feminist Approaches to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales" in Bottigheimer, Ruth, *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp.230-33.

[189] Zipes, Jack, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (London: Heineman, 1979), p.105; Mieder, Wolfgang, "Grim Variations from Fairy Tales to Modern Anti-Fairy Tales", *The Germanic Review* (Spring, 1977), p.100.

[190] Hite, Molly, *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.122.

stories, is not dissimilar to classic gothic structures. Thus, in the old-fashioned, aristocratic world of Lovegrove in Tennant's *House of Hospitalities*, Candida considers that the experience of Amy's social and physical restrictions constitutes a "barbaric fairytale life". (pp.78-9) Both genres have been regarded as oppressive fictions of patriarchy in their perpetuation of specific models of femininity (the marriage plot, for example). In their common imagery we may regard their relationship as an "intertextual" one.[191]

Revisionist perspectives by feminist writers often concentrate on exposing and reversing the limitations of the female roles. Carter's version of Little Red Ridinghood, for instance, acknowledges the desires of the young girl herself, who willingly falls asleep between the paws of the wolf.[192] Other feminist writers address the heterosexist character of the tales' patriarchal slant; the lesbian feminist Olga Broumas reconfigures women's relationships with each other in tales like Rapunzel.[193] Ellen Rose situates Carter's treatment of the tales in relation to that of two American poets:

> Sexton is an analyst of fairy tales and their cultural implications, while Broumas is an improviser, using the tales as a base for imaginative speculation. Carter is both.[194]

Other important alterations comprise these contemporary versions. Commenting on the familiarity of the fairy tale form, Tennant remarks that although it is comprehensible to all, it lacks irony;[195] in accordance with the characteristic treatment of the fantastic, feminist writers place the fairy tale in a context in which this lack is obvious, or treat it ironically themselves.

Of all the fairy tales to which the three writers refer, the story of

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[191] See Newman, Judie, "The Revenge of the Trance Maiden: Intertextuality and Alison Lurie", in Anderson, Linda (ed), *Plotting Change*, discussing the possible interpretations of the term 'intertextuality'. Paraphrasing Kristeva, she proposes that a most useful conception of the term, relevant to cultural media beyond just literature, is "the transposition of one or several systems of signs into another". This also accounts for the familiarity of fairytale plots and characters in cultural circulation, pp.113-14.

[192] "The Company of Wolves" in *BC*, p.18.

[193] Broumas, Olga, *Beginning with O* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1977).

[194] Rose, Ellen C., "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales" in Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (eds), *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983), p.222.

[195] Tennant, Emma, *The ABC of Writing* (London: Faber, 1992), p.47.

Bluebeard is the most potent and the most commonly evoked. The plot of secrecy, a labyrinthine castle, violence, the awakened sexuality of a young girl by an older patriarch has easily recognisable parallels with the classic gothic narrative. Indeed this link between Bluebeard and the gothic and its recurrence in contemporary women's fiction has been briefly acknowledged.[196] In *The Bad Sister*, Jane's paranoid state leads her to imagine that Margaret has killed her previous husbands in a gendered role-reversal; she wonders, "did you kill them perhaps, like Bluebeard, and leave them in a small room with their congealed blood?" (p.149) The abbreviation of a gothic plot comes in the short-hand reference to this fairy tale. *Woman Beware Woman* contains the best example of this abbreviation, in Minnie's internalised and paranoid response when she is told that Des Rooney hit Kitty Rooney after interfering in his secretive life: "Bluebeard, I thought". (p.94) The fairytale plot or theme of violence has been condensed to the one name which bears the familiar story. This shorthand, in which elements of murder and secrecy are contracted into a single word, is frequently the technique used by contemporary writers in relation to fairytale.[197] The overtly sexual motives of the character are invoked in another of Tennant's novels; the protagonist of *Robina* is told, "He's not a Bluebeard" (p.34), in reference to "Prince P." who embodies the sexual threat in a farcical picaresque. Amongst Plath's juvenilia are poems entitled "Cinderella" and "Bluebeard"; the latter includes both the violence of the sexual threat posed by the main character, and also the humour in undercutting the traditional story:

> I am sending back the key
> that let me into bluebeard's study;
> because he would make love to me
> I am sending back the key (ll.1-4)

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[196] Duncker, Patricia, *Sisters and Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Tanith Lee and Margaret Atwood are two writers who have reworked the Bluebeard story. Duncker may have taken her title from Tennant's 1990 novel of the same name, although notably she does not mention Tennant's work in her survey.

[197] Weldon comments on the expediency of this technique in relation to humour. In a short essay, "Towards a humorous view of the universe", she explains how useful this "shorthand" can be: "I the writer understand all that [the inferred content of a brief remark] and so do you the reader, and what a relief, we don't have to go through all that again." *Women's Studies* 15 (1988), pp.309-11 (p.311).

At the same time, the position of the speaker, as a heroine who has already entered the study, means that the experience of sex and violence are still anticipated - both by the reader and the speaker.[198]

Similarly, to a young girl uninitiated in the life of the rich and sexually experienced, Lord Lovescombe's power and apparent sexual licentiousness in *The House of Hospitalities* (Jenny has seen his "naked form, almost pearlized, waxy" at night in the garden (p.37)) are frightening to the extent that she casts him as "a Bluebeard father". (p.58) In the absence of understanding of the world in which she finds herself, Jenny interposes the familiarity of a fairy tale narrative, imagining that Lord Lovescombe's "mistresses and former schoolfriends of his daughter lay in a mutilated heap somewhere". (*HH*, p.58) Apprehensive of the "wrath of the patriarch and adulterer", she perceives him through "the child's picturing of Big Bear tracking down the missing Goldilocks". (*HH*, p.117) She translates the unknown into a gothic narrative, since for her, life at Lovegrove is a gothic experience. Although as such it is both fearful and exciting; imagining the room holding the family's modern art collection as a "mixture between Aladdin's cave and Bluebeard's secret room", she responds to the subject matter of this art with as much curiosity and longing as trepidation. (p.121) Accentuating the sexual content of these tales does indeed expose their kinship to the gothic, particularly in the heroine's response to danger. Pleasure and fear combined is experienced in the "Bloody Chamber" by the heroine, who "felt the exhilaration of the explorer" (p.24). The coyness of a double negative expresses this paradox too when used by Tennant's young heroine, Jenny: "Memories of infancy, when...witches lurk in the corners of the house, came sharply and not entirely unpleasantly back to me." (*HH*, p.129)

The tales often appear as inversions of the originals, or with sexual and violent physicality re-introduced to the story. So whereas Carter's wolves tend to be men and vice versa, the narrator in Tennant's *Alice Fell* hides "for fear

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[198] Since young girls negotiate their adolescence through the narratives of fairy tale, due in part to their stories of female maturation, Tennant's *Queen of Stones*, a narrative that concentrates on the myths important to young girls, contains references to many different tales: *Hansel and Gretel* (p.18), *The Princess and The Pea* (p.22), *Beauty and the Beast* (p.29), *Rapunzel* (p.43), *Little Red Riding Hood* (p.43), *Goldilocks* (p.47), and *The Snow Queen* (p.69).

of paws under the long purple dress, the wolf-shadow on the wall" (*AF*, p.253) since she is worried that Aunt Maria may be disguising a "hairy face" beneath her "lace cap". (*AF*, p.252) In a reversal of common female stereotyping, often derived from fairy-tale characterisation, Weldon catalogues the possibilities for male characters, anticipated as one of several types: "The prince? The dwarf? The toad?" (*LS*, p.12) Weldon's heroine, Elsa, expects one of these characters to enter the room, rather than Victor, because "imprisoned in a tower", she imagines herself to be Rapunzel and projects the fairy-tale narrative onto real events. In *She-Devil*, Weldon makes explicit the cutting of the female body which was a feature of the original Cinderella story. Tennant makes a similar reference in *Robina*, when Lord E. ominously suggests, "Let's see if the Slipper fits" (p.50), and he means on her vagina. An inversion of the tale's plot is effected because Robina wants to be "alone and undisturbed in her Rags by the Fire" rather than approached by the Prince and her Uncle, both seen as sexually threatening. (*R*, p.129)

The fictional setting of a forest has been described as "a distinctive Gothic environment which is both fairytale and menacing".[199] Commenting on the semantic and traditional literary relation between woods and madness, Carter admits to being "very fond of forests",[200] while Tennant also employs this trope for these same associations in *Woman Beware Woman*, in which the real forest and the one depicted in the tapestry both reveal a secret violence, and they are "read" by the character-narrator who perceives the world through a delusional state. Weldon uses the image - "pale knights upon pale horses in dark forests" - as a sign of romantic fantasy. (*LS*, p.27) Even when stamped with the plastic quality of a postmodern version, it retains the old thrill of danger: "Was there a glint in his eyes? The glint of Red-Riding Hood's wolf or Serena's Bluebeard; wicked eyes peering out of a Disney forest-scape?" (*LS*, p.165) Gemma invokes this comparison to deflate the sense of threat, although at the same time this characterisation of Mr Fox most accurately depicts the reality of the threat he poses.

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[199] Howells, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction*, p.24.

[200] Carter, Sage interview in Bradbury, p.193.

In *Little Sisters*, Weldon emphasises the physical aspects of the fairy tale in a similar way to Carter's treatment in *The Bloody Chamber*. The fairy tale told to Elsa is "like any tale told in retrospect, heightened in the telling, *purified of pain*, reduced to anecdote and entertainment".[201] This idealising impulse in the art of story telling which makes the fairy tale "pure" is not unrelated to the idealisation of the female figure to which Ruth aspires in *She-Devil*. Weldon's use of irony works to re-introduce the pain, and the violence, which have been effaced both in the telling of a fairy tale and in the surgical reconstruction of a woman who makes herself into the Princess fairy-tale character. Ruth's pain following the operations is treated ironically by the narrative since it is largely self-inflicted (to the extent that it is her own intention). The Plathian phrase "purified of pain" further suggests the two extremes negotiated in female self-identification - the transcendent and the embodied - a dialectic central to writing which explores the discrepancy experienced between image and self. As a form which has historically provided images of feminine identity, the fairy tale, with its motif of marriage, emphasis on patriarchal structures, and ease of invocation through abbreviated forms becomes an ideal literary form to append to the gothic. References to fairy tales are scattered throughout Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's fiction, sustaining a feminist impetus and directing our attention to the similarities between two influential, and conspicuous, literary traditions of the fairy tale and the gothic.

A Painted Vision

The attention given to the stereotyping myths of the fairy-tale tradition belongs to a broader project of 're-visioning' familiar cultural tropes, partly inspired by John Berger's book, *Ways of Seeing* (1972), in which he examines the depiction of the female figure in the art of Western culture. A ground-breaking study in this period, *Ways of Seeing* coincided in some respects with

[201] *LS*, p.60, emphasis added.

feminist reappraisals of both the visual and literary arts.[202] As the modern women's movement emerged, feminist critics began to analyse the relations between women, representation, and ideology.[203] This examination had resonance not just for those who questioned the 'neutrality' of art history as a discipline, but also for those interested in cultural images generally - in both high and popular culture, as Berger himself discusses. Within a year of his series, Mulvey was writing in a similar vein: "the female form has been used as a mould into which meanings have been poured by a male-dominated culture".[204]

The three writers under discussion engage with many of Berger's ideas, in particular the gendered character of the spectator/spectacle relationship, in which 'woman' becomes "an object of vision".[205] Certainly their novels contain numerous allusions to well-known painters.[206] It might be argued that there is nothing particularly original in this phenomenon of literary references to fine art.[207] In its early history, the gothic was itself imbued with a strong sense of the visual through its dependence on the Burkean sublime and its employment of stage-set qualities; the settings used to be aesthetically created, derived from "a farrago of popular eighteenth-century

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[202] Pollock notes a debt to Berger's book in her essay, "What's wrong with 'Images of Women'?", p.132. See Parker, Rozsika and Griselda Pollock (eds), *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85* (London & New York: Pandora, 1987), pp.132-38. In fact, Berger is cited in many of the early 1970s pieces collected in *Framing Feminism*.

[203] See Parker, Rozsika and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

[204] Mulvey, Laura, "You don't know what is happening do you, Mr. Jones?", *Spare Rib* 8 (1973), p.16. Reviewing the work of the painter/sculptor Allen Jones, Mulvey's article focuses on Freudian conceptions of male castration anxiety. Discussions surrounding the representation of "the female form" have since been refined by considerations of class, race, sexuality, and nationality.

[205] Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.47. In his discussion of the effects of looking, Berger demonstrates the fetishisation of the *surface*: "To be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise", p.54.

[206] In Tennant's case, this tendency arises partly from a formal training in art history, as she attended the *École du Louvre* in Paris following her years at school. See Haffenden, p.281. Carter's interest in surrealism is evident in her introductory note to a short work on Frida Kahlo's painting: *The Images of Frida Kahlo* (London: Redstone Press, 1989).

[207] Helena Michie records the "conspiracy of writing and painting metaphors in the capture of female likeness" as a primary feature in a number of Victorian novels. See *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press), p.103.

pictorial images".[208] However, the emphasis on the visual in contemporary women's writing is uniquely innovative in that it engages with prominent traditions both in art and literature which together review a history of the representation of women.

The writers' choices of reference are frequently esoteric, although the broad range includes images from high and low culture. Tennant, for instance, assumes the reader's familiarity with the style of a particular school of artists when, in *Two Women of London*, Robina's ability to interpret a political and psychological situation is attributed to the fact that her eye was "accustomed from childhood to the art of Grosz and the Expressionists". (*TWL*, p.18) In an earlier novel an allusion to "[t]hose Dutch pictures of vegetable heads" (*WBW*, p.106), points to the artist Archimboldo and provide a means for Minnie to "read" Old Tom. Hugo's stature is enhanced by a history which refers to "Trotsky and Mexico", and tales of the "pursuit of a beautiful and gifted painter" (possibly Kahlo).[209]

Generally these references are used to underline the contemporary character of the gothic, to express a feminist sensibility with regard to visual representation of women, and to establish the middle-class credentials of characters (and possibly of the writers themselves). The styles of the paintings can also be significant, when chosen for their fantastic or realist forms. Similarly, the invocation of familiar paintings may formalise, in a visual sense, a fictional scene by lending it a pictorial framework or counterpart. Consequently, in *The House of Hospitalities* the character Jenny *sees* in an allegorical manner by "that flash which heightened emotions...can give to the eye"; the circumstances of Amy opening a door are thereby transformed into the likeness of a Fragonard painting, and this formalises Jenny's perception

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[208] Howells, *Love, Mystery, and Misery: Feeling in Gothic Fiction*, p.24.

[209] *WBW*, pp.80-81. Kahlo also appears in Tennant's *Sisters and Strangers* (p.176) in a point about the neglect suffered by women's art before the contemporary period. Grandmother Dummer asks, "How long did it take the wounded, extraordinary images of Frida Kahlo to break loose from the prison of their creator's gender?"

of herself as audience, watching lives being 'staged' before her.[210]

Often, a visual reference incorporates gothic colouring and an allusion to a gothic predecessor; in *Shadow Dance*, Honeybuzzard is decorated with red beads which shine "like poison berries", and in reply to his question, "Do I look pretty?", Morris sneers, "You look like an illustration to 'Goblin Market'".[211] With this aside, Carter conjures up the familiar images of Rossetti's goblins laden with an excess of fruit, particularly berries, while Tennant, in her novel *Tess*, invokes the image to convey an intensity of colour: "bright, artificial raspberry splash, as hallucinogenic in its desirability as the fruits of Goblin Market".[212] Alternatively, Albertina, in Carter's *Doctor Hoffman*, perpetuates the totemic value of the mad woman in white featured in Victorian paintings and literature, as, in a possible reference to Millais' 1852 painting of the subject, she "looked like drowning Ophelia" (*DrH*, p.53). In *Queen of Stones*, Bess, also clad in white, is established in her regal persona of Queen Elizabeth when she is described as having "a face people have called pre-Raphaelite" (*QS*, p.72). The classic device of the gothic portrait - whereby the presence of long-dead ancestors governs a house of the living - makes a rather prosaic appearance in *The House of Hospitalities*. The "portrait of the woman in white who so dominated the room" makes Victor Crane, in his proximity to it, appear to Jenny like the ghostly figure's familiar, as if he were "one of the nameless members of the necromancer's bestiary". (*HH*, pp.60-61) Clearly not intended to scare the reader, this appearance of a gothic cliché is included to illustrate the way in which the young visitor interprets the foreign scenes around her; just as she later sees Bernard Ehrlich and Sonia Fount 'through' remembered "illustrations in an Arthur Crane book of Beauty and the Beast", and Ehrlich

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[210] *HH*, pp.114-15. Indeed, later Jenny describes her visit in these terms: "I scanned the room with the kind of impatience a *theatre-goer* feels when the curtain fails to go up. The *play*, of course, for which we were waiting (and which no one wanted to see) being the betrayal of Amy by Candida" (p.182); and, she comments on the necessity of such visual work, when she realises there had been "signs and implications...which I had myself failed *to picture* on my short visit". (p.183, emphasis added).

[211] Carter, *Shadow Dance* (London: Virago, 1995 [1966]), p.130. Further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

[212] In one edition of the poem, an abundance of red fruit features in the colour illustration entitled, "Sucked their fruit globes fair or red". Rossetti, Christina, *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (London: Blackie & Son, 1923), illustrations by Florence Harrison. *Tess*, p.42.

in terms of "Jekyll on the way to becoming Hyde".[213]

Similarly, the writers' feminist perspective on the canon of Western art becomes apparent in certain aspects of characterisation. In order to emphasise the pornographc view of women held by the figure of the Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber", Carter introduces several painters and their works; in his study, the new bride discovers the Marquis' inheritance of Watteaus, Poussins, and Fragonards (*BC*, p.20). Explicit reference is made to Rops and the characteristic depiction of a girl with "her cunt a split fig".[214] The heroine's ambivalent response to this picture is central to the problematic of the story as a whole, a problematic which Griselda Pollock acknowledged in relation to women's art. Writing in 1977, she claimed,

> I would argue the absolute insufficiency of the notion current in the women's movement which suggests that women artists can create an alternative imagery outside existing ideological forms.[215]

Carter's story on its own is able to demonstrate the truth of Pollock's early concerns. Women writers, like some women artists, incorporate into their work imagery belonging to such "ideological forms" and directly engage with them, rather than attempting simplistically to ignore them. Therefore, when Tennant's *House of Hospitalities* repeats the dynamic of Carter's story above, it is likewise in order to parody a male artist's depiction of woman-as-object and to show the effect of the "expressionism of Ehrlich's style" on the uninitiated narrator-protagonist, Jenny. Ehrlich's painting displays "a carcass suspended between two blue ropes, a head affixed as an afterthought, the point of focus being a vulva the size of an average pub-sign" (p.137). The painter's arbitrary decision to include "a head", along with the body as

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[213] *HH*, p.143. Tennant is, in fact, referring to *Walter* Crane's illustrations of the fairy tale. These are highly romantic depictions of the characters, which reveal influences of the pre-Raphaelites, and Japanese and Italian designs on this Victorian painter; the Beast, who appears as a boar, is dressed in a red uniform resembling that of a cavalier and wears a monocle. *Beauty and the Beast Picture Book* (London & New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1901), pictures by Walter Crane, engraved and printed by Edmund Evans. A reference to this book also appears in *Tess*, p.54.

[214] *BC*, p.16. Possibly a reference to Rops' *Offertoire*.

[215] Pollock, Griselda, "What's wrong with 'Images of Women'?" in *Framing Feminism*, p.136. This shares the same impulse as Stein's claim that Moers' study neglects "the male-defined context of female behaviour". See section I of this chapter.

"carcass", indicates an anti-feminist perspective of the female body; the humorous detail of the "pub-sign" immediately undermines this construction and renders absurd his aspirations of depicting an 'erotic' view of a woman.

The subjects of paintings are not, however, restricted to depictions of women in these novels. In *Robina*, when the heroine contemplates "The Raft of the Medusa" in The Louvre (p.61), the scene succinctly conveys her confrontation with a well-known representation of the themes of death and cannibalism, and stands in the world of the novel as a contributing source of a 'naïve' girl's corruption. A similar scheme is employed by Carter in *Doctor Hoffman*, in which the "landscape looks like a fan painted after Poussin" (p.192); an allusion comparable to that in Scott's *Waverly*, in which a representation of the natural world is made through an artificial construction: "the landscapes of Poussin".[216] An emphasis on the fact that we see the world through 'texts' and on the postmodernist self-consciousness of such framing, partly accounts for the great number of visual references in the three women's writing, as they insist that the reader be aware of the act of reading itself.

Occasionally an emphasis on style proclaims the purpose of an allusion. In *Woman Beware Woman*, the narrator differentiates the world of reality from the world of her active imagination through the identification of a realist style. Hence "the objects in a Dutch still-life: fish, shirt, child, drawer" (*WBW*, p.117) articulate a simple directness - "my most real memory", she calls it - which expresses this distinction, and which is mimicked in the monosyllabic words of its synopsis. (This description stands in marked contrast to the predominantly Baroque list of "Murillos and Titians and Ruysdaels" (*WBW*, p.97) belonging to "the American", which simply indicates acquired wealth and excess.) In fact, the narrator of this novel, Minnie, has such an intense, hyperactive sense of vision, she imposes the visual memory of Hugo falling dead in the forest onto the face of the kitchen clock which is physically in front of her: "Hugo walked into a thicket of Roman numerals and fell in the roots." (*WBW*, p.60) Here, Tennant asks us to visualise language itself; her narrator

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[216] Scott, Sir Walter, *Waverly* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972 [1814]), p.176.

concentrates on the material quality of signs, a perception which then easily slides into the remembered shapes of the forest.

Carter's writing too employs references to art in a sophisticated manner: they appear both in her play with language and in the specific project of her radio play, *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*. An example of an art reference used as a fulcrum to her play with language is bound up with Carter's perception of the freakish, which she provisionally defines as "to be made, not born".[217] While, as we may recall, Stead's "freakish, Bosch-like hell" is a place where animated objects and animalized people are encountered,[218] Carter's *Doctor Hoffman* puns on a title from Bosch - the Count "stalked, erect, among this garden of artificial delights" (*DrH*, p.132) - thereby highlighting the difference between a sense of the sublime originating in 'Nature' and a view of the world as a circulation of commodities. Carter capitalises on the erotic character of Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1504), but uses this to comment on the meaning of "earthly". For this neatly epitomises an emphasis on the construction of eroticism, or the sexual, often featured in Carter's writing, where she has argued, for example, that "our flesh arrives to us out of history".[219]

The outcome of fictional interplay between writing and painting interested Carter, who based her radio script on Dadd's painting, *Come Unto These Yellow Sands* (1842). Taking this picture as a starting point for her narrative, she 'animates' the image, engaging with its history, so that the play functions as "a piece of cultural criticism in the form of a documentary-based fiction".[220] She proposed an absurd variation on this theme with "the idea of a play of the same kind about Jackson Pollock that would re-invent Pollock's paintings and his times, in the same way as we re-invented Dadd's

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[217] Carter introduction to De La Mare, *Memoirs of a Midget*, xvii.

[218] Lidoff, p.206.

[219] *The Sadeian Woman*, p.9.

[220] Carter, *Yellow Sands*, p.12.

paintings for radio".[221] This engagement with the art world is part playful revision, part intellectual investigation.

Colouring The Gothic

> O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
> - "Metaphors", l.4

Further to this attention to the visual, the three writers seem to perceive a symbolism of colour which is associated with both fairy tales and the gothic. The three primary colours of the gothic are repeatedly intoned, in expressions of both admiration and envy, in the Grimms' tale, "Snowwhite": "White as snow, red as blood, black as ebony!"[222] The context of the tale, in which the heroine is poisoned by the jealous step-mother and then falls into a death-like sleep, and the prevalent symbology of western European culture, indicate that the colours may broadly represent virginity, passion or violence, and death. In a poem appropriately entitled "Metaphors", Plath identifies this same essential cluster *and* declares the allegorical application of these colours. Such implications are clearly spelled out by some descriptions in Carter's work: in "The Company of Wolves", for example, the heroine's cheeks are "an *emblematic* scarlet and white", and she wears "the red shawl that, today, has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow".[223]

In Tennant, repetition often achieves a similarly insistent effect: "red lips, lips as red as the holly berries...a face in snow-white powder, and red, red lips." (*AF*, p.247) A caricature mask constructed through this striking contrast, on the one hand, reminds us of the totemic value which fairy-tale

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[221] Carter, *Yellow Sands*, p.12. The humour in this suggestion depends on the knowledge that Pollock's work is non-figurative. It is worth remarking on the effect created by radio which Carter exploits; the "atavistic power of voices in the dark", she claims, means that the radio production of *The Company of Wolves* is akin to the horror stories of the 1950s radio series, *Man in Black*. (pp.10,13)

[222] Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, *Selected Tales*, trans. David Luke (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 [1812]), pp.74, 80, 81.

[223] "The Company of Wolves", p.113, emphasis added. Carter was always acutely conscious of colour - in her fiction and her life. In a letter to Lorna Sage, she describes her house newly painted in gothic hues, favoured over the blandness of cream colours, and jokes about their deathliness: "it is the jolly old red & black & VIVA LA MUERTE & sucks boo to Snoo's barley and bamboos". Lorna Sage, "Death of the Author", *Granta* 41 (1992), pp.233-54, (p.241).

characters have in our culture. On the other hand, the exaggeration in the description underscores the co-existence of connotations of the sensuous and the deadly. This combination of pleasure and violence, along with the two-dimensional quality of drama, is indicative of the gothic. The same novella contains descriptions of the landscape which are both Carteresque and fabulous in their mixture of lyrical language and disturbing imagery: "the red carcass of the sun hung in the mist that swirled from the river, and the snowdrops, hidden in prickles, drew sparks of blood." (*AF*, p.258)

No critic has mentioned the specifics of colour in relation to the gothic, particularly in contemporary writing, but Cornwell does note "the colours of the fantastic" in two nineteenth-century novels, both of which belong to the gothic canon.[224] As he comments on the proximity of white, red, and black in Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890), Cornwell seems to associate this scheme with the protagonist's attraction to "Roman Catholic ritual", and the novel's "decadent brand of Gothic revivalism".[225] It is arguable that this colour scheme now used in contemporary gothic writing derives partly from this same religious historical tradition - that of the Catholic liturgy - and partly from its appearance within a literary genre. For the occurrence of the scheme in Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) belongs to its "central mythic image" which Cornwell sums up as: "a man (in black) bending over a woman (in white) to suck out her life (in blood)".[226]

These colours pertain to the vibrancy of memory, they articulate fear;

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[224] Sedgwick discusses colour very briefly as a general concept in relation to Radcliffe's novels (and comments that "the obvious traditional referent of color symbolism is sexual desire" (p.162)). *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, pp.161-63.

[225] Cornwell, pp.102, 103.

[226] Cornwell, p.107. Tennant's *The Bad Sister* also describes a vampiric exchange, one between women, which is recounted in terms of red and white (see *BS*, 133-35). Buci-Glucksman traces an "extremist, coloured somatology" in Strauss' opera, *Salomé* (1905): "Lily-white, grape-black, pomegranate-red: the coloured segmentation of Jokanaan's body symbolizes Salome herself as virgin, murderess and passionate would-be lover". Buci-Glucksman, Christine, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage Publications, 1994 [1984]), p.158. Designating the baroque in the context of Buci-Glucksman's argument, the moment in the narrative which she recounts, of Salomé kissing the dead man's mouth, is unavoidably gothic. Here, Wilde's play (1890), the libretto of Strauss' opera, repeats the colour scheme which earlier appeared in *Dorian Gray*. As we will see in Chapter 3, visual representations of Salome contemporary to Strauss and Wilde are relevant to the reappearance of the Baroque in women's writing of the late twentieth century.

for the Ella of Tennant's *Faustine*, they speak to the intensity of childhood experience, as she recalls a significant incident:

> My head gets a cut and the man takes a white handkerchief from the breast pocket of his immaculate *dark* suit. He mops my head and the *white* lawn handkerchief is splodged with *blood*.[227]

The gothic colours also serve to mark this moment in the narrative as a clue to the diabolic identity of the man in the "dark suit". This scene acquires the same mythic status as the central scene identified in *Dracula*, whereby it is pared down to its essential components, intensifying the memory and heightening its visual impact.

Tennant's work in particular seems to be obsessed with colour, and novels such as *Queen of Stones* and *The Bad Sister* are saturated in white imagery. In the latter, one paragraph alone includes the following fragments: the air is "milky white"; "scraps of white paper float along"; "ghostly figures"; hot wind "blows white dust"; "fine white dust"; "white tulip"; "a flying figure in white papier maché...swathed in white plaster"; the latter might be "the Snow Queen, this white, artificial, sexless thing"; "this white bottomless world". (*BS*, pp.68-69) The strange episode is one of Jane Wild's hallucinatory experiences, induced by her contact with Meg who is apparently a modern-day witch. The disorientation caused by the obscuring effect of the colouring, compounds the eerie quality of observing the female "ghostly figures" which are finally concentrated in the single, deflated, papier-maché woman. The similarity here to the central figure of Plath's "In Plaster" cannot be overlooked, as once again Plath's work provides a point of reference in judging a feature of contemporary women's writing - in this case, the distinctive use of colour. In this poem, a white body-cast is perceived by the speaker as a double of her own self, embodied by this second skin; bound to, and yet distanced from, this other, the subject struggles to assert her own identity within the ambivalent relationship between the "new absolutely white person and the old yellow one" (l.2), who exchange back and forth the roles of transcendent "saint" and material "dead body" (ll.4,6,38,55). Tennant's image also unites these two

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[227] *F*, p.91, emphasis added.

antitheses - the figure is "flying", light and uninhibited, but is also substantial, as it is "swathed" in plaster - and the figure represents the "other" feminist self which Jane has not previously acknowledged, but which now actively 'haunts' her.

The spell of this white vision in *The Bad Sister* is subsequently broken with the 'smell' and visualisation of the colour red: "The rich smell of Sunday dinners cooking, the red meat spitting in this white bottomless world gives me nausea." (*BS*, p.69) Once red interrupts the preceding imagery, the whiteness shifts in its associations to a sign of apocalypse. This "white bottomless world" is comparable to the obscuring white fog in *Queen of Stones*, in which the lost schoolgirls think a "nukle war" has occurred. (p.133) The disturbing effect of red, also conveyed through the image of meat, can be found in Carter's *Heroes and Villains*. Here, Marianne's induction into the world of the Barbarians is furthered by a scene in which Donnally's six brothers return from hunting, and the kitchen is "transformed into an abbatoir"; the young girl is overwhelmed, and this impact is expressed principally through gothic colours:

> Marianne's bewildered senses reported only a whirling conflict of black and red...she seemed to smell the hot stench of red itself and hear the incomprehensible sound of black. (*H&V*, p.46)

Interestingly the appearance of animal flesh again seems to incite a moment of heightened response in the female character. Here, however, colour affects Marianne's other senses, not just her sight, as it becomes an agent of the confusion which is inflicted on her. The source of her confusion - the gang of pagan brothers - is similar to one found in another Tennant novel, in which two Irish brothers (the Rooneys) blamed for the murder of Hugo, conjure up these associations for Minnie:

> as I fell asleep I saw them hot...a blot of dark red...an accident, an act of violence so hot it blots the memory. I woke hot, as if this unwanted heat had crept up the fuschia lane and into the cold house. (*WBW*, p.97)

In these passages from both Tennant and Carter, a young woman perceives the fear *and* attraction which are simultaneously present in the process of initiation.

This effect of synaesthesia involving colour is particularly striking in Plath's poetry. In the poem, "Tulips", the colour of the flowers bears

connotations of both the sexual and the painful:

> The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me,
> Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe
> Lightly through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.
> Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.(ll.36-39)

As in the passage from Tennant, colour here acts as the medium of relation; the experience of having an ill, damaged body (or, as may be implied, a female body), is metonymically equated with the image of the muffled tulips - passionate, but restrained - through their colour associations. The image cluster at the centre of this poem may be considered gothic because of its dual emphasis on pain and sexuality, and because of the experience of bodily entrapment. These sensations are aroused elsewhere in Plath's work by the experience of pregnancy.[228] In "Three Women", a voice speaking of miscarriage in a maternity ward uses the abstract language of colour to convey emotions; it articulates sorrow and loss through the colour of effacement - a "world of snow" in the white sheets (ll.64-65) - and anger and a desire for death through similarly representative hues: "I am a garden of black and red agonies. I drink them/ Hating myself". (ll.149-50) The experiences of self-haunting and self-loathing in Plath's poem, are crucial to a reading of the gothic as it is written by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon too; this kind of alienation is rendered in colours unmistakably gothic.[229]

In Carter's *Shadow Dance*, the character Honeybuzzard is 'marked' by the poisonous-looking "red beads" he wears (p.130). Morris Gray (like Wilde's protagonist's, his name is ironic in a story full of colour[230]) finds a visual echo of these red 'berries' equally disturbing; he thinks of his wife Edna wearing "white beads which had the appearance of a lot of little skulls. Skulls of their babies, never to be born". (p.160) Throughout texts such as Carter's, moments of heightened experience are expressed in the "violent colors of

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[228] Moers cites motherhood as "a mine of troubled fantasy and black humour" for women writing the gothic. (p.97)

[229] The poem continues this colour scheme: "A dead sun stains the newsprint. It is red." (l.153) The red "sun" of the miscarried foetus meets the black and white of newspaper, contrasting the love and hate aroused by the loss with the dispassionate backdrop of 'news' (facts, reality, history) - "a world where there was black and there was white but no shadows" (*ShD*, p.160).

[230] Cornwell, p.102.

fantasy life"[231] and are thereby transformed into morbid, but vibrant images of a materialist 'hyper-realism'.

One possible explanation for the writers' sensitivity to the feature of colour and its importance in their fiction is offered by Tennant herself:

> years and years of being downtrodden has given women another eye: often, women see things in more detail, with more *colour*, and observe psychic states more closely, than the equivalent 'male' eye.[232]

Whether or not one concedes such a socialised gendering of the gaze, Tennant's opinion recalls Kahane's allusion to a "special eye" for the visual in women's gothic writing.[233] It is undeniable that these women writers demonstrate not just a sophisticated knowledge of the visual arts generally, but also a fascination with a heritage of emblematic gothic scenes.

## IV."Severe Beauties": The Iconography of the Female Body

It is within this matrix of gothic allusion, a strong emphasis on visualisation, and colour symbolism that representations of the female figure come into focus in the fiction of these three writers. An interest in the female figure here is not in itself surprising since feminist attention to this figuration belongs to a more general trend in contemporary theoretical debates. Further to this context, however, it is also possible to discover manifestations of the female figure which Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's writing specifically shares, and the gothic designs which adhere to these figures will be our concern in the following chapters.

The first of these points is borne out by the significance of the body in feminist studies, where the representation of the female figure, as well as the lived experience of women, has long been of interest. In the 1980s, feminist

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[231] Lidoff, p.210.

[232] Tennant, "Pandora's Box" in Sellers, *Delighting the Heart*, p.189, emphasis added. In Tennant this keen sense of the visual is further applied to language, whereby she 'sees' letters on the page as a sort of figurative art. In *The Bad Sister*, Margaret expresses the deadening effect of her marriages as she observes "her married names pile up to the right of her like the corpses of flies" (p.149).

[233] Kahane in Fleenor, p.244. See section I of this chapter. Berger's investigation of the dichotomy of the male 'viewer' and the female 'viewed' does not fully assess the distinctions between essentialised and socialised explanations for these differences.

philosophy advocated the re-introduction of the body into dominant discourses as one of its central tenets. Feminist critics have argued that the conception of rationality within the Cartesian model of the subject is "undetermined by the empirical, social, or bodily experiences of the thinker." Consequently, "discourses such as psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodernism propose and require alternate ideas of subjectivity", ideas which reinvest representations of bodily experience into the conception of (female) subjectivity.[234] Embodiment is, of course, a pivotal issue in the disciplines of psychoanalysis, feminism, and postmodernism, negotiating as they do maturation, gender difference, and the effects of late capitalism respectively.[235] As we noted earlier, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon all demonstrate an awareness of modern conceptions of the subject, and their work, in its fictional treatment of the female figure, is clearly influenced by these three theoretical traditions. In its varied explorations of identity then, their work seems to subscribe fully to feminism's assertion that gender identities are "created by and reflect structures of power, language, and social practices and our struggles with and against these structures".[236] It is possible to count literary generic structures - such as the gothic - among these formations through which we learn to read and enact gender identity. These many cultural forces are made visible when we attend to the delineation of the figurative female body in the writers' fiction.

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[234] Flax, Jane, *Disputed Subjects: Essays on psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p.96.

[235] None of these is a unitary discipline, but instead has many different positions. Jane Flax calls all three of them "transitional modes of thinking [which] are both symptoms of the state of our culture and partial, necessarily imperfect, tools for understanding it." Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley & Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), p.14.

[236] Flax, *Disputed Subjects*, p.97. Flax also mentions race as another social relation to be taken into account. The postmodernist argument that subjects are discursive effects, as opposed to transcendental, ahistoric, objective entities, is a crucial point of reference here. Judith Butler outlines one of the implications of this for feminists: "the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constructed by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate emancipation"; the category of "women" is "produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought". See *Gender Trouble*, p.2. This dynamic of resistance and complicity will prove to be central to the depiction of the female figure in contemporary women's fiction.

Among the many accounts for the current emphasis on the body,[237] an intriguing explanation for the prominence of "body discourse" is the argument that there are striking similarities between the baroque period and our own postmodern era. For if, as Christine Buci-Glucksman proposes, an alignment can be discerned between the aesthetics and ideologies of baroque and postmodernism, based primarily on "a fascination with artifice, especially montage and allegory", it is possible to recognise the relevance of such a description to Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's writing where such features are frequently conspicuous.[238] Moreover, this 'recurrence' of the baroque is conducive to certain cultural conditions whereby the female body becomes a symbol of cultural crisis; hence its centering in literature which exhibits a realisation of these conditions.

However, the appearance of the female figure in contemporary fiction is a more complex phenomenon than the straightforward manifestation of feminist responses to a synchronic view of culture. Tracing the transformation of specific image clusters across national boundaries and over a two-hundred-year period, one literary critic has proposed an "iconology" of images: a description of images parallel to art history's 'iconography'. Theodore Ziolkowski notes the prevalent explanations for the transmission of images from one literary text to another - via the collective unconscious or through conscious literary invocation - and proposes that an iconology of images should consequently take account of "the influence of theological, philosophical, and political ideas upon the images as well as the purposes and

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[237] While recent interest in the body is still predicated on the work of Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Foucault, the major social changes which Bryan S. Turner claims have brought the body into prominence are: "the growth of consumer culture in the postwar period, the development of postmodern themes in the arts, the feminist movement and finally what Foucault has called 'bio-politics'." Turner, "Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body" in Featherstone, Mike, Mike Hepworth, Bryan S. Turner (eds), *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* (London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage, 1991), pp.1-35 (p.18).

[238] Introduction by Bryan S. Turner, to Buci-Glucksman, *Baroque Reason*, p.11. Turner provides a useful summary of Buci-Glucksman's argument: she brings together "studies of the seventeeth-century baroque imagination, the emergence of feminist theories, and the avant-garde of the twentieth century" in order to examine how alternatives to the dominant patriarchal conception of reason are manifested. (p.16) Her conclusion, broadly, is that "[t]he culture industry of modern society is thus a new version of the culture industry of the baroque". (p.25)

inclinations of the individual artists."[239] This mirrors Jameson's primary concern that genre be studied from these two perspectives, that is, from the diachronic and synchronic simultaneously, while also gauging a relation to the history of ideas.

Furthermore, Ziolkowski's argument that the images which he discusses have undergone a process of secularization - a process which he terms "disenchantment" - is directly relevant to the treatment of image clusters found in contemporary women's writing. Firstly, this "disenchantment" is parallel to the type of "de-mythicisation" so central to feminist revisions of classic fairytales, for instance, in which the "magic" effects of the original are defused. Secondly, the effect of "disenchantment" inevitably recalls Jameson's notion of "pastiche" in postmodernist writing; the parallels are discernible when Ziolkowski argues that,

> as the originally justifying meaning is withdrawn from any particular image..., the image remains in literature...but it is usually reduced in literary status, becoming, for instance, a figure in a parody or a ghost story.[240]

While he seems to be suggesting here that it is the context - a parody or ghost story - which reflects the diminished status of an image, we might substitute "impact" for "status" in accordance with Jameson's reading of generic tropes in postmodern literature. For, as Jameson's notion of pastiche seems to suggest, such tropes do acquire an effect of the ghostly once the original meaning has waned in strength.

This strange combination of cultural familiarity and depleted meaning is frequently highlighted in the novels' references to certain symbols in a manner which makes Ziolkowski's notion particularly apt. Tennant alludes to Plath's iconographic status within contemporary culture, for instance, in an account of Jason's wife in *The Magic Drum*: "Muriel did look like some beautiful icon, the flat, gold face and black eyes looking out in peace and

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[239] Ziolkowski, Theodore, *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.16.

[240] Ziolkowski, p.247. The figural impotence implied by Ziolkowski is evident in Jameson's definition of "pastiche": "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language...amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction". *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1991 [essay 1984]), p.17.

sorrow at the darkened room." (*MD*, p.17) The one-dimensional and painted qualities of this image intimate the composition of female figures to be found elsewhere in contemporary fiction. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter too attends to the beautiful and often exhausted character of icons: "Tristessa had no function in this world", Eve says, "except as an idea of himself; no ontological status, only an iconographic one." (*PNE*, p.129) Here a disjunction between the material self and an image of that self articulates the distance inherent to self-perception which we saw earlier experienced as self-haunting. In addressing the complexities of literary representation, the three writers look specifically at the tension between body as metaphor and as itself (if we can speak of "just" the material body), a tension which may be said to underlie much of Plath's imagery. It becomes clear that for Carter *et al* the image most likely to absorb individual identity, and to create this distance, is an image of the past, an image which has mythic status. Thus when she and Tristessa are alone and likely to die, Eve envisions their memorial in the following way: "The desert would mummify us in the iconic and devastating beauty of our embrace, I nothing but a bracelet of bright hair around his bones." (*PNE*, p.151) Eve transposes their encounter, earlier described in very physical terms, into a familiar poetic image, in this case borrowed from John Donne's poem, "The Relic".[241] These are examples in which the figure of the female body carries a pronounced totemic value, thereby signalling an attentiveness to similar configurations elsewhere.[242] This emphasis on iconography carries *two* implications which constitute the central interests of this thesis: the relationship between narrative and the 'reading' of the figure of the female body, and the pivotal role which this figure plays in the various connotations of contemporary gothic.

The significance of the representation of the female body in English literature immediately raises questions for feminist writers about the use of

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[241] Carter quotes Donne directly: "A bracelet of bright haire about the bone" (l.6). Gierson, Herbert (ed), *Donne: Poetical Works* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1929 [1633]).

[242] In Carter's novel, Tristessa's gender, and Eve(lyn)'s for that matter too, is a complicated affair; I am loosely categorising the character here as "female" because the image to which he/she aspires, and the one which is projected to the world via the cinema screen, is acutely feminine.

conventional metaphors. Adopting the language of containment and escape, Michie for one has outlined the primary structural character of what is basically cliché:

> The use of metatrope to imprison the female body and to distance it from the reader is embedded in the language of metaphorology itself.[243]

Michie points to the role of "writing and painting metaphors in the capture of female likeness", suggesting that both art forms are "equally complicitous" in this tradition of *framing*.[244] The stasis and mythicisation inherent in this construction prompt the counteractive response of rhetorical 'movement', which has been identified in various feminist strategies. Commenting on Weldon's *Remember Me* and *She-Devil*, Bronfen points out that these novels "enact what it looks like if the language that performs the tropes of femininity becomes reality."[245] The rhetorical device which Barreca has called "metaphor-into-narrative" involves a literalisation of commonplace idioms. This is in fact an important feature of the contemporary feminist gothic, both as a semantic strategy and as tropic literalisation, whereby cliché is reanimated. In reading the metaphorical literally, contemporary writers unsettle our assumptions about the conventions which may underlie those metaphors. Indeed, the self-referentiality of language and a challenge to "apparently immovable structures of reality" are both made evident by this device.[246] Barreca suggests that the device works like an "optical illusion"

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[243] Michie, Helena, *The Flesh Made Word*, p.102.

[244] Michie, p.103. She is principally referring to Victorian fiction in her study. We can see how this dual focus may also be applied in a similar fashion to contemporary examples of the framed female figure.

[245] Bronfen, Elizabeth, "'Say Your Goodbyes and Go': Death and Women's Power in Fay Weldon's Fiction" in Barreca, Regina (ed), *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions* (Hanover, London: University Press of New England, 1994), pp.69-82 (p.73). An earlier essay by Barreca includes some useful comments about the significance of gender in reading these "metaphor-into-narrative" devices, and the manner in which they have provided a narrative structure for novels written by women. However, in her haste to establish that it is women who disrupt a "masculine view" through a last-minute foray into Lacanian semiotics, Barreca does not fully explore the implications of her brief characterisation of the humour which results from the metaphor-into-narrative strategy, as "more apocalyptic than reassuring". The examples she cites from Spark and Weldon involve a violence which is as central to this strategy as the comedy it produces, yet this aspect is overlooked. Barreca, Regina, "Metaphor-into narrative: being very careful with words", *Women's Studies* 15 (1988), pp.243-56.

[246] Barreca, "Metaphor-into-narrative", p.252.

in terms of the 'double-take' required to read such an illusion properly. My own concern is with a parallel "optical" effect, in addition to this linguistic one; that is, not the optical effect involved in the use of words *per se*, but an emphasis on the literally 'optical' or visualised figures. In contemporary women's fiction the inert "metatropes" of which Michie writes are regularly submitted to a similar procedure of literalisation, and the effects can lead to intricate images of violence, play, and beauty.

In the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, the appearance of a series of figures, which may be regarded as iconic in their visual and mythic status, coincides with possible interpretations of contemporary meanings of the gothic. In these novels, the "severe beauties"[247] which emerge combine "the gorgeous with the grotesque",[248] a synthesis that is itself constitutive of gothic vision. To read characters' bodies as if they were signs is, as we have seen in the last chapter, a notion which is current in gothic studies. Confirming the basis of Sedgwick's position that characterisation in gothic literature operates through a set of codes, Claudette Columbus points to the legibility of these bodies: "Gothic characters find themselves and their possessions locked behind skin or stone façades that are overpriced, overwritten, and misunderstood."[249] Such a surfeit of inscriptions seems to demand an act of decoding; this is certainly the case if we concur with the view which states: "the Gothic genre suggests that we are written upon by culture and its cruel corrections".[250] The legibility of the body's surface is itself announced by the remarkable appearance of many characters, such as Carter's Jewel in *Heroes and Villains*. In exaggerated form, Jewel's torso tattooed with Adam and Eve by the Tree of Knowledge - both a "grotesque disfigurement" *and* an "undergarment of colour" (p.85) - illustrates both

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[247] Carter, writing about Walter De La Mare's "fictions of bourgeois unease", claims that "repression produces its own severe beauties". Intro, *Memoirs of a Midget*, xiv.

[248] Columbus, Claudette Kemper, "The Heir Must Die: *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a Gothic Novel", *Modern Fiction Studies* 32 (Autumn, 1986), pp.397-416 (p.399).

[249] Columbus, p.398.

[250] Columbus, p.407.

Carter's professed fascination with surfaces and their potential for signifying abstractions,[251] and one critic's conclusion that in the late twentieth century our skins have become "cryptogrammatic".[252] Eliding for the moment any implications regarding the "gothic times", as Carter referred to the present, the immediate consequence of this view is the pronounced *textuality* discerned in the figure of the body, and how informative this proves to be in searching for the transfigured shapes of the gothic in contemporary literature. A preoccupation with literary and visual iconography, then, will ultimately be seen to coincide with Sedgwick's summary of the feminist-marked advance in gothic studies:

> the class and gender arguments have led to new ways of problematizing not just actual and representational human bodies..., but the labor, the economics and the poetics of embodiment itself.[253]

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[251] *Fireworks*, p.132.

[252] Kemper, p.404.

[253] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, vii.

# PART TWO
# The Poetics of Embodiment

*En ma fin est mon commencement*

# CHAPTER THREE

## "SONOROUS JEWELLERY": FIGURES OF SILENCE

> Naked and bald in their furs,
> Orange lollies on silver sticks,
> Intolerable, without mind.
> - "The Munich Mannequins", ll.13-15

Feeling free "to loot and rummage in an official past",[1] Carter, Tennant, and Weldon have written novels which draw on a variety of texts including hegemonic discourses such as philosophy, history, and myth. Contemporary theorists have 'deconstructed' these discourses through an examination of their constituent uses of language, and feminist critics in turn have uncovered the gendered nature of such language, thereby demonstrating Spivak's assertion that the "discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman".[2] Writers of fiction have likewise turned their attention to exploring this figuration of the female body. Among the figures which their novels have in common, the 'chokered woman' both adumbrates a feminist perspective on discursive languages and amplifies our understanding of the term 'gothic'. The figure of Mary Queen of Scots, which can be considered within the rubric of the 'chokered woman', is an image unmistakably related to silence, yet it also 'speaks' through a visual iconography of her historical connotations.

### A Topology of the Subject

In re-assessing the conception of the Cartesian subject and the discourse to which it belongs, contemporary feminists have paid greatest attention to the gendered symbolism of its language. Throughout the history of classic philosophical thought there exists a distinction between the mind as

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[1] Carter, "Notes From The Frontline", p.74.

[2] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "French Feminism in an International Frame", *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), pp.154-84.

masculine and the body as feminine.[3] Joanna Hodge demonstrates how Descartes' distinction between mind and body results in a functionalist view of the sexes since it identifies the female function of reproduction as "that single element central to the definition and process of being a woman", making clear one of the sources of a long tradition which draws a correlation between woman and the body.[4] Challenging the fixity of this metaphorical gendering, feminists have suggested ways in which the gendered categories of mind and body might be reconsidered in the wake of the subversion of earlier models, the Cartesian subject among them, which had carried a 'universal' authority as the raw material of Western philosophy.[5]

It is true of course that the identification of the body with the feminine is regarded by some critics as a feminist move in itself. Surveying the gendered nature of Western philosophy's symbolism, Genevieve Lloyd points to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, who, in the context of their existentialist ethics, both associate the feminine with 'immanence' - that which must be transcended in order to achieve full subjecthood. Indeed, de Beauvoir asserts that women too must contend with the supposed immanence of their own bodies; a material immanence which prevents them from attaining subjecthood and thus becomes a source of alienation. For de Beauvoir, female subjects must struggle with this problem "as if they can achieve transcendence only at the expense of alienation from their bodily being".[6] This is a paradigm which proves useful as a possible background to imagery such as the

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[3] See Gallop, Jane, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Hodge, Joanna, "Subject, Body and the Exclusion of Women from Philosophy" in Griffiths, Morwena and Margaret Whitford (eds), *Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988); Lloyd, Genevieve, *The Man of Reason* (London: Routledge, 1992 [1984]).

[4] Hodge, Joanna, "Subject, Body and the Exclusion of Women from Philosophy" in Griffiths and Whitford, pp.152-68 (158-59).

[5] One such model, found in Philo's *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis*, demonstrates the binary nature of the symbolism of early philosophy, when its author claims that "the female gender is material, passive, corporeal and sense-perceptible, while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought." Quoted in Lloyd, p.26. Lloyd rightly points out that while Philo's allegories may appear fanciful to the twentieth-century reader, "the ideas and ideals articulated through them became deeply ingrained in the developing structures of thought about Reason and gender." (p.28)

[6] Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*, p.101. Lloyd questions this ideal of transcendence, suggesting that it is more "a male ideal" than de Beauvoir acknowledges.

chokered woman and to the poetic vocabulary of Plath. In de Beauvoir's argument that women collude in this representation of woman as body, she might be describing the female character of a gothic narrative who experiences marriage as incarceration:

> when woman is given over to man as his property, he demands that she represent the flesh purely for its own sake. Her body is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence; it is not for such a body to have reference to the rest of the world...it must end the desire it arouses.[7]

While it is the case that the female body in contemporary gothic may be seen to "end" male desire by absorbing its ethos and in turn 'reflecting' this back to its originator, the female body's references to the world are in fact manifold.

Contemporary writing specifically highlights the cultural vocabulary which intercedes between the female subject and its contexts. "Woman, like man, *is* her body", writes de Beauvoir, "but her body is something other than herself."[8] This otherness, we begin to see, is actually constructed through metaphor, leading Luce Irigaray to pose this crucial question: "without the exploitation of the body-matter of women, what would become of the symbolic process that governs society?"[9] Irigaray's work is useful here because in her incorporation of images of the female body into her writing, she does not replicate the celebratory response of these critics to the traditional gendering of the mind and body. For, as Gallop illustrates, Irigaray is not interested in the substitution of a 'vulvomorphic' logic for the prevalent phallomorphic model, but instead investigates the way in which the *symbolic* infects the 'real'. While some have misread Irigaray as an essentialist,[10] what directly concerns her is in fact the relation between a "topology of the subject" and its

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[7] De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975 [1949]), p.189.

[8] Quoted in Lloyd, p.99.

[9] Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse", *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985 [1977]), p.85.

[10] Chris Weedon seems to mistake her as such in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp.65-66; Linda Alcoff is similarly worried that Irigaray's "emphasis on female anatomy makes her work border too closely on essentialism" in her essay "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory", *Signs* 13 (Spring 1988), p.407, n.4.

constituent metaphors, and the idea that the boundaries between body/mind and passion/reason may fluctuate.[11]

It has been said that Irigaray's "impressive critique of the repression of woman in patriarchal discourse reads at times like a post-structuralist rewriting of Beauvoir's [*sic*] analysis of woman as man's Other".[12] This is because Irigaray's work is acutely aware of the *metaphorical* impact of the body on our understanding of the concept of reason: through a symbolic interpretation of anatomy she points to the symbolism of rationality in Western philosophy and culture. A previously 'invisible' coding of sexual roles underlies this symbolism inherent to philosophical language. In a summary of Irigaray's point that the linguistic relegation of the female role reflects social status, Hodge makes plain the gendered distinction: "For our culture, identity, logic and rationality are symbolically male, and the female is either outside, the hole, or the unsymbolisable residue."[13] Irigaray's work seeks to redress this hierarchisation, showing that the excluding effects of language in relation to the feminine result in the following construction:

> The topology of the subject as it is defined by certain theoreticians of psychoanalysis (cf. the *Ecrits* of Jacques Lacan)...would use the symbolisation of the feminine as a basis or basement for the (masculine) subject."[14]

The symbolism of gender here shares de Beauvoir's design in which woman must 'be' the flesh in order to reflect back to the male Other his transcendent self.[15]

The considerable tradition in philosophy which genders the mind as masculine and the body as feminine has undergone a radical subversion not only in the work of feminist philosophers and critics, but also in contemporary

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[11] Whitford, Margaret, "Luce Irigaray's Critique of Rationality" in Griffiths and Whitford, pp.109-30 (p.125).

[12] Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.98.

[13] Hodge, p.121.

[14] Whitford in Griffiths and Whitford, pp.109-30 (p.120). Whitford's own translation of Irigaray (*Ethique*, 1984).

[15] Irigaray's pronouncement also shows that feminists must hold poststructuralist thought (Lacan in this case) to account for the inherent gendering of the subject in certain poststructuralist discourses which themselves are not entirely exempt from the universalising language of their philosophical antecedents.

fiction informed by the persistent use of this symbolism. One fictive strategy which accords with an emphasis on the symbolic enacts what Irigaray has termed "mimicry", in which to mimic the female role, or image, is "to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it."[16] The writer who adopts this strategy must, Irigaray suggests, look for "ideas" - conceptions such as that of the subject itself - that are mapped onto the female body and

> that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible,' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.[17]

It is possible to recognise this strategy of exposure in the fiction discussed in this chapter, where the project of making an idea 'visible' is revealed in the image of the chokered woman. Through this "playful repetition", the re-presentation of a number of images like the chokered figure avoids reducing the female figure again to a strictly patriarchal intent: as Irigaray proposes, this strategy allows "woman" to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.[18] This critical distance also structures Michie's argument regarding "feminism's suspicion of metaphor, synecdoche, and cliché, and its attempts to circumvent them in a fuller re-presentation of the body".[19]

Thus, Irigaray employs imagery of the female body not as an easy identification of woman and body, but rather to turn our attention to the gendered nature of language itself. It is helpful to think of feminist fiction in a similar way: in their concentrated focus on the female figure Carter, Tennant, and Weldon participate too in such an exploration of language. In this regard, they may be said to be influenced by the poststructuralist notion that subjectivity is constituted in and through language. This view inevitably

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[16] Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p.76.

[17] Irigaray, p.76.

[18] Irigaray, p.76.

[19] Michie, Helena, *The Flesh Made Word*, p.130. Michie occasionally seems to imply that the recovery of a 'real' body is possible, rhetorically uncontaminated by representational practices, as if no perceptible distance need exist between the body and its representations.

leads to a fresh perspective on the language of dominant discourses in Western culture, since, as Irigaray argues, "we must first remember that language is not neutral and that its rules weigh heavily on the constitution of a female identity and on women's relationships with one another."[20] Instead of being restricted or excluded and relegated to a purely metaphorical function by certain discursive frameworks (including the symbolism of philosophy), the aim of this feminist enterprise - both creative and critical - problematises the female subject's participation in discourses which define her. So although at the time when the three novelists began writing, the feminist movement and its Anglo-American commentators often focused on a reclamation of the female body through, for instance, a celebration of maternity and mythic roles, these writers produced novels which reveal an interest in language used to define women's roles.[21] In this way, it might be said that their work reveals a theoretical position reflecting their geographical one, as they show an affinity with an Anglo-American social feminism in some of their subject matter, *and* share a preoccupation with metaphor central to much French feminist thought.

## I. Figures of the Chokered Woman

> Red, mottled, like cut necks.
> There was a silence!
> - "Little Fugue", ll.35-36

Jane Gallop borrows a suggestive phrase from Adrienne Rich - "cruel disorganization" - to point to an imagistic embodiment of the inescapable division of mind and body traditionally allied to the female subject (as the non-

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[20] Irigaray, Luce, *Thinking The Difference*, trans. Karin Montin (London: Athlone Press, 1994 [1989]), p.27.

[21] Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) proposes a difference between femininity and femaleness, a difference embodied by constructed women and natural women. The former are "sent out by 'daddy' to destroy real, natural women", who are able to "peel patriarchal paint off their minds and bodies" and who are "flying free of the power of patriarchal language" into "other dimensions"! For a good summary of Daly's argument, see Tong, Rosemarie, *Feminist Thought* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp.104-07. A year earlier than Daly's book, Carter published *The Passion of New Eve* which includes a parody of the Mother goddess cult into which many feminists retreated.

transcendent).[22] Rich's phrase refers to the figural strangulation of a woman which might suggest the metaphoric separation of the irrational, material body from the rational, immaterial mind. In the figure of the "cruelly" disorganised female body, generic strands of the contemporary gothic intersect with a fictional depiction of the separation of reason from its opposites. The metaphoric use of the female body in western European discourses and the gothic's presentation of a female body continually threatened by violence are conflated in the image of the "chokered" woman in novels by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon. The practice of employing the female body to convey 'metatextual' ideas has been noted by Brenda Silver, in her discussion of the gendered construction of cultural icons and the circulation of "Virginia Woolf", for example, as "a sign in cultural battles, specifically feminism".[23] As an historical female "character" popularly associated with the cerebral, and therefore as Silver argues, a "trope of fear", the icon of "Woolf" comes to signify the opposite of the material aspect of life. The de-feminisation implied by this is explicitly contrasted to the hyper-femininity of Monroe's body, to which the Woolf head has been attached by a feminist artist in a visual statement about definitions of female identity. This then is an example of a feminist strategy of making 'visible', by the repetition of a masculine logic, what is invisible in the most familiar cultural symbolism.

As well as feminist visual artists, writers of fiction include images which feature the neck as a violent point of severance - "cruel disorganization" - on the female body, and, significantly, these are often found in narratives which include the theme of gothic enslavement or threat. A possible feminist reading of this figure in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon not only invokes a gothic reading of their characters, but also uncovers symbolic meanings of this somatic

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[22] *Of Woman Born*, p.284, quoted in Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.1. The opening sentence of Gallop's book declares the source of its title by quoting from Rich: "I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to *think through the body*, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized." I want to emphasise the "cruelly disorganized" part of Rich's question and the strangulation involved.

[23] Silver, Brenda, "What's Woolf Got to Do with It? or, The Perils of Popularity", *Modern Fiction Studies* 38 (1992), pp.21-60. The following point about the composite image of Monroe and Woolf was included in a paper, "Imag(in)ing Virginia Woolf; or, The Perils of Popularity" delivered at the conference, *Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing* at Oxford University, September 26-27, 1992, although it does not appear in the paper's published form above.

disjuncture. One image which these writers share is particularly striking in this respect: the figure of a woman wearing a collar or necklace. In each case, this figure functions as both character in the story and as a metaphorical shape through which a feminist critique of symbolic systems that align the feminine with a representation of immanence is possible. It is arguable that in a way similar to contemporary feminist philosophers, these writers challenge assumptions about representations of women and most importantly, highlight the metaphorical nature of the discourses prominent in Western philosophical and cultural traditions through which subjectivity is negotiated. That this metafictional project frequently coincides with the appearance in the text of an image which can be read as gothic introduces into these novels another 'discursive' frame. Appearing as a gothic body, the female figure expresses a value placed on it by the text in its use as a symbolic embodiment of a familiar construction in order that the text might then subvert that model by presenting it as grotesque, or depicting as problematic the gender associations of the image's constituent parts. The figuratively "split" woman comes to signify the impossibility of a fully realised subjectivity when the distinction of 'male' reason and 'female' body is violently marked out on her body, and when she is passively positioned within a 'male'-oriented economy of property and desire in which the male characters use her as a 'mirror' of alterity to affirm an image of their own integrated subjectivity.

Furthermore, in reading this 'marking' of the body with the necklace, these two angles of interpretation - a reading of the gothic and a feminist reconfiguration of language historically sustaining the conception of the subject - are brought together, in that the mark itself can be related to conventions surrounding the gothic heroine and to visual representations of the female figure. A reading which takes account of the marking of the body in relation to the gothic is advocated, as we have seen, by Sedgwick's interest in the "quasi-linguistic inscription of surfaces".[24] Themes pertaining to the gothic can be read across the figure of the female body, articulated through a vocabulary of visual signs.

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[24] See Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel", pp.255-70.

In considering three examples of the chokered figure, certain points of interest occur: how the female figure is a gothic character in a gothic situation; how the figure is used as a symbol of the split self and thereby reassures the male character of his own 'whole' subjectivity; and how far this double symbolic entrapment demonstrates that one contemporary use of gothic is to problematise traditional constructions of the female subject. This 'double symbolic' practice moves the gothic into new areas while enacting a feminist challenge to both familiar symbolic configurations and, by extension, the discourses to which they belong.

Figure One

> Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour.
> A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.
> - "Tulips", ll.41-2

In Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, the action primarily takes place within the oppressive and claustrophobic world of the house and its toyshop, "an empty space at the end of the world" (p.77); away from this captivity, the scene in the disused pleasureground is a landscape of "pervasive despair" (p.101) which the young girl finds equally strange. Cast as a pale imitation of the toyshop, the pleasureground was once the sight of a "vast Gothic castle...of papier maché" (p.99) which burnt to the ground - the fate which later befalls the toyshop itself. The impression of two dimensions which are lived simultaneously, causing a sense of disorientation in the young heroine, is repeated in her assessment of the two dogs: the painted one with eyes of "coloured glass stuck onto the canvas" and the real one with its "uncanny quality of whiteness, like Moby Dick". (pp.59-60, 83) Deciding that the two take turns guarding the house, Melanie's imagination easily merges the world of painting which she thinks is real, with the real world in which the surreal is possible, until she can no longer distinguish between them: "She wondered insanely, 'Which dog is it, the real one or the painted one?'" (p.83). The Flower family and the puppets are also frequently indistinguishable from one another, creating an effect of the uncanny for Melanie; Finn, for instance, has "papier maché cheeks" and Margaret has "Dutch-doll" arms of "two hinged sticks"

(pp.68,48).[25] As a recognisably gothic heroine, Melanie must learn the "rules" governing life in the house as a means of survival, as she negotiates a new sense of disorientation, suffers a rape in the puppet theatre, and experiences a process of sexual maturation - familiar stages of the gothic heroine's 'education'. Carter's interpretation of this gothic scheme includes the surrogate mother figure of Margaret, and it is her appearance in the text which can be considered in terms of a gothic body with a metaphoric or decorative function in the text. The progress of Melanie's emotional development, as an adolescent girl in a domestic world which is alien to her, is measured against, or in comparison with, her impressions of Margaret. As a mother substitute, Margaret provides a model for Melanie's development, and is herself the emotional prisoner of her husband, Melanie's Uncle Philip, the autocratic puppet-maker.[26]

Descriptions of Philip alone provide a palpable sense of the prevalent gothic atmosphere for which he is responsible: his presence "chills the air", he demonstrates "the casual brutality of the Nazi soldiers" (reminiscent of Plath's "Herr Doktor"[27]), and his likeness on the theatre's poster shows him "holding the ball of the world in his hand". (pp.124, 132, 126) His cruel régime has literally left its mark too on his wife, since her marital enslavement is given physical expression in the Sunday ritual of wearing a grey dress and a silver necklace which "choked her" (p.124). For Melanie, the effect of her aunt's "weird beauty" is principally created by this necklace which Uncle Philip himself has made and which he forces her to wear:

> a collar of dull silver, two hinged silver pieces knobbed with moonstones which snapped into place around her lean neck and [which] rose up to her chin so that she could hardly move her

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[25] Laura Mulvey cites the "uncanniness of puppets" as the source of a Freudian reading of *The Magic Toyshop* before discussing Melanie's brief transformation into a puppet during her performance as Leda. However there are several references to the other members of the family as puppets throughout the novel and the effect of the uncanny operates in both directions: the puppets seem real and the humans seem like puppets. Mulvey, "Cinema Magic and the Old Monsters: Angela Carter's Cinema" in Sage, Lorna (ed), *Flesh and the Mirror: Essays on the Art of Angela Carter* (London: Virago, 1994), p.233.

[26] For a discussion on the role of the mother in Carter's work, see Ward Jouve, Nicole, "'Mother is a Figure of Speech'" in Sage, *Flesh and the Mirror*, pp.136-70.

[27] "Lady Lazarus", l.65.

head. (p.112)

This instrument of both torture and regal adornment figuratively severs her mind from her body. While Philip schedules conjugal relations for the evenings which follow the afternoons of her immobility, controlling the movements of her body as if she were one of his puppets, the collar, made "[t]o his own design" (p.114), is a physical reminder of the mastery he has over her. She seems to be complicit in his ambitions when she describes the necklace with a note of pride: "'It was his wedding present,' she chalked. 'He made it himself.'" (p.114)

The collar and its intentions have resulted in a literal choking of her voice into silence, since she is mute. This silence seems to be a form of protest *and* a "curse", as it was on her wedding day itself that she lost her ability to speak. Carter's novel is thereby faithful to the precedent of fairy tale, as "the theme of silence in conjunction with marriage", Ruth Bottigheimer points out, is "a persistent folktale tradition that has surfaced in virtually every European country."[28] Margaret's brothers' use of the word "dumb" in relation to her condition takes on added meaning in terms of its cause since it is at once 'negative' in connoting a loss of speech and, through the word's alternative meaning, an implied loss of reason, and 'positive' in that it is a gesture of resistance and Melanie believes it confers on her aunt "a substance because she had a characteristic. Dumbness."[29] The significance for Melanie of her aunt's muteness is further underlined several pages later as the initial realisation is repeated: "The word 'dumb' tolled like a bell in her mind." (p.40) The onomatopoeic effect is eerie in its silence - since the word is not spoken aloud by Melanie - and evocative of a death knell. A gothic sense of threat is gestured by the weight of this single word and the indication of a possible fate

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[28] Bottigheimer, Ruth, "Silenced Women in the Grimms' Tales" in Bottigheimer (ed), *Fairy Tales and Society*, p.121. Discussing the cultural context of this image, she goes on to argue that "fairy tales offered an apparently innocent and peculiarly suitable medium for both transmitting and enforcing the norm of the silent woman. To the extent that these tales corroborated and codified the values of the society in which they appeared, they reinforced them powerfully, symbolizing and codifying the status quo and serving as paradigms for powerlessness." (p.130).

[29] p.37. This anticipates the character Baudelaire's view in Carter's "Black Venus" that "the perfect stranger" is "dumb" (p.18), as discussed in Chapter 4.

which it marks on the figure of Margaret. Already then the consequences of this literal and metaphorical strangulation are seen to be complex. Instead of a simplistic inversion of the feminine body, masculine mind construction, Carter's text problematises this binarism in its attention to issues of complicity and resistance, enacted by the female characters in response to the patriarchal world of the toyshop. In considering its gothic character, the female figure emerges as a focal point for other textual patterns in the narrative. Margaret can be identified as a gothic body in three ways: first, Philip's comparison of her to Mary Queen of Scots; second, Melanie's own reading of her aunt's appearance; and third, a kind of violent language in the text which is contiguous to the depiction of Margaret's character. In all three of these registers, the necklace is the pivotal image.

The association of Margaret with Mary Queen of Scots comes about through the performances of Uncle Philip's puppet theatre. From the beginning of the novel he pays more attention to his puppets than to family members in the house, only engaging with the latter when they are required to participate, as actors or audience, in performances of the puppet theatre. Uncle Philip's warped love for inanimate objects affects his treatment of humans to the point where he expects to command the same degree of control over them. This repeated disturbing relation between wood and flesh makes explicit his attitude towards Margaret and finds its most extreme expression in the "mixed" performance of Leda and the Swan in which Melanie is virtually raped by a puppet. Similarly then, there is a direct visual correspondence between Margaret and a puppet when the household is made to watch a dramatised "historical sequence", a secret meeting between Mary Queen of Scots and Bothwell. In this scene, the Queen "wore a collar like Aunt Margaret's but it could not chafe her because she was made of wood." The sight of this collar reminds Margaret of her pain: Melanie notices that her aunt "surreptitiously ran her finger round her own silver choker" (p.129), transferring an experience of the visual to her own physical condition. Once the scene has collapsed in confusion with Finn's fall to the stage, a sound "like the mechanism of a time bomb" (p.131) can be heard. This noise refers beyond its literal cause of the clicking limbs of the Mary Queen of Scots

puppet making its exit. For just as the imagined bell summoned by the repetition of the word "dumb" earlier suggested an ominous marking of time, so too does the image of the time bomb refer both to a sense of time within the novel itself - the expectation of Philip's anger at the failed ending of the performance, a climax to the building tension - *and* to the actual "historical sequence" of the dramatisation of Mary Queen of Scots' story and our cultural familiarity with her fate. Through Margaret's resemblance to the Queen, she is surrounded by a sense of historical time contracted into a narrative distillation of gothic created not by suspense alone - the ticking of the bomb - but through an accumulation of imagery suggestive of gothic violence and incarceration. The ever-present threat is focused on *her* image, as it is caught by the necklace and its reference to the imprisoned Mary awaiting her beheading.

Melanie's "reading" of her aunt's appearance is similarly negotiated through images which are already familiar to her and which carry specific cultural connotations. Margaret seems to prefer the "deadly, flat shade of grey" of the dress and the necklace of "real silver" to the decorative possibilities which Melanie herself desires and which she imagines would be the unfettered choice of Margaret: "flower brooches in fragile, glittery stones, and small, gold lockets with tinted photographs of babies and soft curls of new-fledged hair inside." (p.114) The juxtaposition of these images suggests, and serves to emphasise, the association of Margaret's appearance with a gothic style, since by contrast to Margaret's medievalism, the character of the "gold lockets" seems strikingly romantic.

While Melanie is still able to recognise that this gothic beauty has a "weird" and "exotic" aspect, it is nevertheless disturbing to encounter in the narration (which we can assume belongs to Melanie via a third-person indirect construction) her impression of Margaret's beauty as "pared to the bone". (p.113) This sinister phrase, reminiscent of Plath, and also foreshadowing the intimation of Baudelairean death in "Black Venus" in the image of the "rouged skulls",[30] manifests a linguistic contagion or transference of Philip's

[30] "Black Venus", p.13.

autocratic vision to his niece. Yet, one of the first hints for Melanie that her aunt is not fully complicit in her role as 'queen' to his 'king', comes in the last line of the detailed description of the necklace: "above it her eyes were anxious and sad and not proud at all." (p.113) This betrayal of Margaret's "real" reaction to her husband's constriction of her movements seems to be expressed by her mind as a separate response from her body. Her entrapment then is doubly symbolic, being both generic and figurative: fixed within her marriage and the gothic household, and fixed within the terms of a "masculine" logic whereby the discord between mind and body prevents the appearance of a fully realised self or the expression of an unfettered will. This double symbolism, in its sheer exaggeration, may be said to perform an act of textual subversion. For, as Whitford says, commenting on Irigaray's theory of mimicry,

> [g]iven that there is no other language in which to talk about representations of women except the essentialist language of metaphysics, Irigaray is proposing that we might be able to turn this to our advantage by assuming it deliberately.[31]

Hence we find a literary trope which gestures toward the conceptual configurations of this "language of metaphysics" by displaying a person divided between mind and body. The figure of Margaret may be read as a trope which functions as a rhetorical mirror in which Philip's complete (thus powerful) sense of identity can be confirmed, while the character's discomfort - "[s]he throbbed with the effort of containing words she could not speak" (p.121) - works against this figuration. Although the novel's climax of the fire may be seen by some as a capitulation, the plot also redeems her subordinate position since her passive role is briefly transformed into active resistance.

If there is a tension between complicity and defiance in the figure of Margaret read "above" the collar, there is a similar ambiguity in the depiction of her body "below" this point of severance. For rather than suggesting a

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[31] Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p.72. This seems to be contrary to Cixous' proposal that women "fly the coop" of male discourse; in order to contain it, rather than being contained by it, women must fly "through" language - in an apparently utopian gesture. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Marks, Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds), *New French Feminisms* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp.257-58.

somatic materiality as might be expected in a reading of her body figuratively divorced from her head, she in fact seems curiously *disembodied* in her "eldritch beauty". The connotations of ghostliness and the supernatural add to her gothic characterisation. The dress itself denies the existence of a real, perceptible body beneath it, as it falls "straight from her shoulders to a hem mid-way down her shins in a long, vertical line". (p.111) The comparison of Margaret to "the good girl in Sunday school" and her resemblance to "an icon of Our Lady of Famine" (p.113) portrays her disembodied state as adolescent or pre-sexual. Indeed, the reference to famine confirms that she is "pared to the bone", both physically and in the simplicity of the image imposed upon her. The presence of her *own* body effaced, her identity is deferred to, and articulated through other representations.

Indeed, an emphasis on the metaphorical use of the female body in Western culture is itself on display here through an accumulation of "types" such as "Our Lady". The contrast between a pure, virginal body and a transgressed, sexual/maternal one, conflated in the Catholic figure of the Virgin Mary, is invoked when Margaret's dehumanisation by the piece of jewellery lends her the appearance of a passionless icon. The icon of "Our Lady" is an impersonal sign which denies the presence of a material woman, as her Sunday appearance is seen to be "an annihilation" (p.111). Carter frequently plays with this image from Catholic iconography throughout her stories of female puberty and sexual initiation, often emphasising its allegorical function. In her work she seems drawn to the employment of Catholic iconography in a manner which highlights the fact that while Catholicism espouses a transcendent spirituality, it is also heavily dependent on a sensuous materialism.[32] The humour which accompanies this corporeal embodiment of "Our Lady", and underlies the disproportionate application of

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[32] Feminist, gothic, and nationalist implication converge in Liz Lochhead's play, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. Here she suggests Protestantism may be considered 'masculine' because it effaces the Virgin Mary's role in Catholicism: MARY: "Then the Protestants dinnae love oor Blessed Virgin?" LA CORBIE: "Knox has torn the Mother of God from oot the sky o' Scotland and has trampit her celestial blue goon amang the muck and mire". *Mary Queen of Scots* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p.22. The 'plasticity' of myth is evident in Carter's thin, but playful short film, *The Holy Family Album* (1992) which domesticates and secularizes the Christian myth, in what Sage calls the writer's "plea for mortality". Sage, Lorna, "Death of the Author", *Granta* 41 (1992), pp.233-54 (p.254).

the epithet, is representative of Carter's style. This particular focus of her humour finds a precedent in women's writing of the early twentieth century which also takes Catholicism as a target of its feminist humour,[33] although Carter's humour largely relies on a feminist re-materialisation of myth.

The abstraction underscored in these references to the figure of the Virgin can also be seen in a later novel by Carter. In *The Passion of New Eve*, the film star Tristessa, like Margaret, is fixed in a specific role defined by male desire and is similarly referred to as "Our Lady of the Sorrows", directly related to her name as the quality of suffering, the embodiment of an *idea* or state rather than a full presence. As an object of desire, Tristessa also becomes "Our Lady of Dissolution" who represents an abstraction in acting as a catalyst to the entropy Evelyn discovers in New York. Marina Warner has pointed to cultural representations of the Virgin as an embodiment of the spiritual dimension of life, a representation that thereby effaces the figure Eve's evocations of sin and sexuality.[34]

Reinvesting the mythical then with some degree of 'reality' can reveal the originary impulse behind it and thwart its application as a universal, ahistoric sign. The allegorical body loses some of its power to categorise women when read in terms of its moment of cultural production:

> By recognizing the type of pollution which allegorical entities are warding off by their whole impregnability we become more able to make them help us, not bind us, by playing with the assumptions which structure them, by refashioning the body which has been appropriated to mould an inverted image of collective fear.[35]

Like the images in the painter Frida Kahlo's work, which Warner cites as examples of such "refashioning", Carter's description of Margaret-as-Virgin

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[33] Gagnier's inventory of institutional structures includes Roman Catholicism as an extension of school strictures for some girls earlier in the century. Gagnier, Regina, "Between Women: a cross-class analysis of status and anarchic humor", *Women's Studies* 15 (1988), pp.135-48 (p.143). See Chapter 2, section III.

[34] The metaphoric role of these figures for 'woman' is also apparent in de Beauvoir's pronouncement that "woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary". De Beauvoir, p.175. According to Warner, even the maternal role functions as an ideal, so that the Virgin Mary breastfeeding the infant Christ suggests a metaphysical nourishment more than its literal meaning of physical need.

[35] Warner, Marina, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Pan Books, 1987 [1985]), p.263.

betrays the tension between her function as sign and as 'material' presence - the relation revealed in Plath's "Blubbery Mary"[36] - even as the image is presented as metaphor. The desire to be disembodied is expressed through Catholic imagery in Plath's "Fever 103°" too: the lyric "I" becomes a

> pure acetylene
> Virgin
> Attended by roses,
> By kisses, by cherubim
> By whatever these pink things mean.(ll.46-50)

An abstraction of a "pure acetylene" self that signals the dissolution of the individual into the anonymous realm of symbol and archetype, Plath's image is also transformed into a kitsch plastic icon ("whatever these pink things mean"). Similarly, Carter's invocation of the Virgin Mary figure, often as camp as Plath's, emphasises an allegorical reading of the female body which ordinarily effaces its material presence as it stands in for Christian concepts such as purity and chastity, and instead grounds it firmly in the material world. In fact, the iconography associated with Margaret encompasses both the comparison to the Catholic figure and a depiction, painted by Finn, in which she is surrounded by cupids "in low relief in pink Plasticine". (p.109)

Margaret is not successfully disembodied by the metaphor of the Virgin Mary. This becomes evident when Melanie reads her aunt's appearance as grotesque and fragmented, while focussing on the materiality of certain parts: "her chapped, bony wrists and her hands on which every knotted sinew and vein was visible protruded limply [from the sleeves], as if they were stitched separately to the cuffs and not part of her arms at all." (p.111) Not only does this perception of Margaret's hands fit the description of a puppet's limbs, but it prefigures the Freudian scene of Melanie's "uncanny" discovery of the severed hand in the drawer. (p.118) Both the perception of Margaret's hands and her vision of the severed hand point to Melanie's discomfort with the material body. Yet, the Freudian intimations of the latter discovery mean that Melanie's uneasy relationship with these hands can be interpreted as posing a threat to the formation of a stable sense of identity. For Melanie must negotiate what are two classic instances in which Freud locates the sensation

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[36] "Medusa", l.33.

of the uncanny. Related to what is frightening, it occurs when there are doubts about whether something is animate or inanimate, as in the case of "ingeniously constructed dolls", and is also aroused by the sight of "[d]ismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist,...all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them".[37] Both sources are apparently present in Melanie's first visit to her uncle's workshop, "a wooden-leg factory *Walpurgisnacht* of carved and severed limbs." (p.66) Since the uncanny is linked to Freud's notion of the castration complex, this provides one reading of Melanie's sense of threat to her identity. In reacting to her aunt's body as a site of the uncanny, Melanie perpetuates her Uncle's objectification of her, treating her less like a subject in control of her own will, and more like an 'effect' of the Freudian furniture.[38]

By reinvesting the metaphoric with a measure of the literal (here a magnification of the grotesque body), Carter undermines the process of idealisation, the distance between body as cultural icon and 'historic' material being. This employment of a familiar figure from the Western tradition of allegory belongs to Carter's acute cultural criticism. Not only does she use the comparison of Margaret and Mary to present a dialectic about the representation of women generally and the way in which such figures are persistently used metaphorically, but Carter's fiction can also lay claim to the suggestion that the figure of the Virgin Mary itself, through Carter's irreverent treatment, seems to acquire the characteristics of a gothic body. The comparison with Margaret lends the Catholic icon a kind of death-in-life status: both 'petrified' as myth and embodied by the grotesque. The mocking tone of "Our Lady" reinvests the symbolism of ultimate bodilessness with a material presence, just as the pain of Margaret's choker acts as the mortification, and reminder, of the physical body. A mock version of a medieval chastity belt, Margaret's collar not only restrains her desire, but also

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[37] Freud, Sigmund, "The Uncanny", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp.217-56 (pp.226,244).

[38] A curious equivalence of hands with identity also occurs in a recent re-working of the gothic in Kenneth Branagh's film, "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" in which the reanimated Elizabeth is composed of Justine's body, but with her own *head* and hands sewn on. This is not dissimilar to the Woolf/Monroe composition discussed by Silver.

her freedom to speak. For Carter's protagonist then, the expression of desire is directly related to an access to language, and the bar to both worlds is experienced as a gothic state of incarceration, silence, and secrecy.

This question of silence in particular merits closer attention. No critic who has explored Margaret's role in this novel has noted that although she cannot speak, and in addition to silently "performing" reactions to events, she does *write* her communications to other characters. A productive way of interpreting Margaret's inability or unwillingness to speak is through the Derridean deconstruction of the hierarchical opposition between speech and writing, which exposes the traditional prejudice of the former as bearing a 'presence' of meaning.[39] As the only character in the novel directly associated with the act of writing, Margaret potentially occupies a significant place within it. The style of the language which she uses in her chalkboard notes is noticeably different from that of the other exchanges between characters; the style announces the written quality of these communications. Her writing falls between 'speech' and the usual understanding of the 'written' (as reproducing meaning after time has passed), since it is used for immediate purposes as a substitute for speech, and yet it is not speech. It negotiates two linguistic spaces, that of her silence and that of the dominant discourse of the toyshop, operating outside the rules of Philip, who cannot overhear them. Finn and Francie are also aligned with alternative forms of expression in their associations with painting and music respectively. Less a protest of silence than an individual discursive space, her writing does not conform to the regulations of the gothic house, as she herself must do, but instead fashions a white-on-black 'negative' image of writing.

The third aspect of the novel which ties Margaret to the gothic is found in the choice of language involved in her characterisation. In the novel's first full description of Margaret during the Sunday ritual, the gothic character of this endlessly rehearsed scene is constituted in the proximity of certain phrases. The fragility conveyed in "her lean neck", her eyes "anxious and sad",

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[39] Derrida describes the "strange space...*between* speech and writing" as the site of *différance* itself. See Derrida, Jacques, "Différance", *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982 [1972]), p.5.

and her transformation into "a spare young girl" emphasise her brutal victimisation in their contrast to the "dull silver" of the hinged necklace which "snapped into place". (pp.112-13) This last phrase is made more sinister still by an effect of syllepsis, as if it were her neck which snaps along with the collar. A disturbing semantic association can also be read back into this description, when two pages on, Finn tells Melanie that the weekly appearance of the collar is a visible sign that Margaret and Philip have sex, and he demonstrates his disgust at this idea by spitting. This sets up an interesting series of reactions, for the uninitiated Melanie is "distressed" by this ejaculatory gesture which she regards as vulgar, as indicative of a lower class to her own. More important still is the description which follows: "The ball of spittle lay on the floor like a shed moonstone." (p.114) This occurs in the text so closely to the detailed description of Margaret's necklace as "knobbed with moonstones" (p.112), that, read retrospectively, the image of Margaret's necklace comes to represent Finn's disgust at Philip's mistreatment of his sister. Yet the image may in fact register something more sinister, since the indication of disgust marks *her* body when she is wearing the collar. She is thus marked by the abject, as the expulsion of corporeal excess.[40] It may suggest an expression of Finn's disgust with Margaret as a desiring subject or a proprietary gesture in his conflict with Philip over control of the house, since he is metaphorically spitting out the words, "they make love on Sunday nights, he and Margaret", as he literally spits saliva.

This act of linguistic abjection serves as an apposite image of the complex representation of desire in this modern gothic story. For, as in several of her other fictions, Carter points to the negligible boundaries which belong to the Sadeian scheme of pleasure and pain. Margaret's collar may be "barbarian", but it nevertheless lends her a temporary "eldritch beauty". (p.113) The "erotics of severance" has been identified by Buci-Glucksman as a prevalent phenomenon in the *fin-de-siècle* period, both in literature and the

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[40] Kristeva's theory of 'the abject' (crudely, an expulsion of alien elements in the process of establishing boundaries of the self) is considered in the following chapter. Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

arts.[41] 'Chokered' female figures were portrayed by several artists, as she points out; among them was Fernand Khnopff, whose depictions of 'collared' women offer apt illustrations for Carter's character Margaret, and for the figurative effects addressed in this chapter. (See FIGURES 1 and 2)

Carter's work frequently displays a fascination with the baroque configuration of beauty and pain, and textual delight in this combination often irrupts into the narrative in de Sade's own language: "*Il faut suffrir [*sic*] pour être belle.*"[42] In this respect it is significant that Uncle Philip is aligned with a Sadeian torturer when the first puppet show that he performs before the children is announced in French as "*Morte d'une Sylphe*" (p.127); this piece features the puppet which Melanie was shown earlier by Finn, a "fallen doll in white satin and tulle", the sight of which distressed her when she concluded that "the doll was herself". (pp.67-68) As in Carter's re-telling of the Bluebeard tale in "The Bloody Chamber", which is full of references to European music and painting given in their original languages, this narrative too displays a sort of textual pleasure in the sounds of language, so that there is a sumptuousness about the quotation in French even as it conveys a darker message at the same time: that Margaret's suffering in wearing the collar is Philip's idea of beauty, "not what one would expect Aunt Margaret to have chosen for herself" (p.113), and that this view in turn is slowly being imposed on Melanie who already suspects that she is "without volition of her own". (p.76)

Indeed, Melanie responds to Margaret's weekly incarnation with a sense of awe, her comparison of Margaret to the "Queen of Assyria" betraying her own impression that her aunt looks beautiful in the collar despite her

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[41] Buci-Glucksman, p.156. This phrase refers specifically to Baudelaire's "Les Bijoux". Her study shows the striking similarities between the recurrence of the baroque at the end of the century *and* its recurrence in the postmodern period.

[42] *MT*, p.113. This same phrase in French - sophisticated in the context of English, but ominous in its literal meaning - also appears in Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*."*Il faut souffrir*", Ruth tells Judge Bissop, "in order to get what you want." (*SD*, p.159) Here, the suffering is caused by self-initiated cosmetic surgery. It is also worth noting that Carter thinks each language has a unique capability or range of expression; discussing literature's bid to reproduce the effect of abstract painting, Carter wonders, "Maybe you can do it in French, God knows." One mode which French does capture, and hence its use in Carter's novels, is decadence. Interview with Lorna Sage, *New Writing*, p.192.

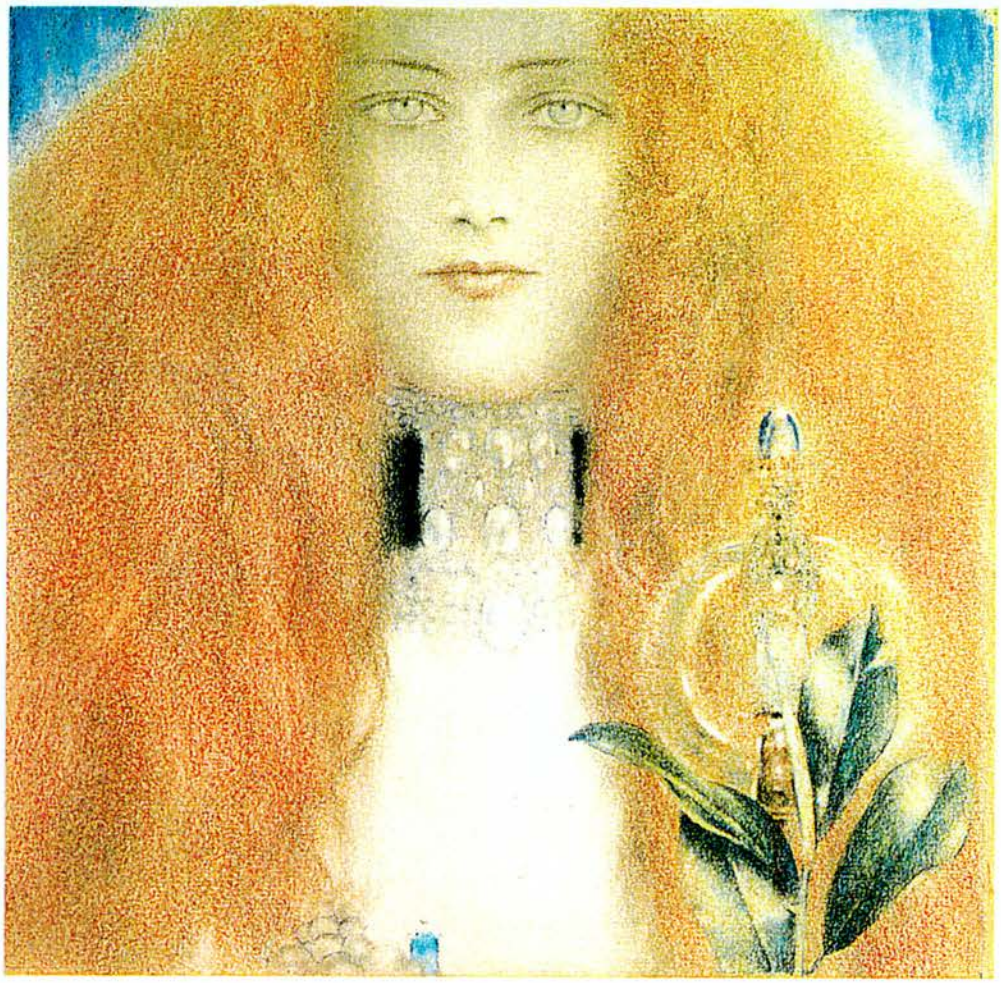

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

knowledge that it is painful. Yet it is telling that the narrative undercuts Melanie's innocent and girlishly romantic notion of a queen through the irony of her choice of royalty, since it is unknown to Melanie that this comparison refers to a lineage of brutal kings, and the choice comments on Philip's character and his insistence on his wife's supportive and subjugated role rather than implying a position of matriarchal power and beauty. Melanie's entry into the world of knowledge then is aligned to a shift from a view of history as a collection of romantic stories to a sense of the possible brutality underlying visions of royal grandeur. In effect, Melanie must learn to read the figure of her aunt's 'chokered' body properly, to recognise the suffering which creates the effect of that beauty and thereby to understand the cost of her uncle's "patriarchal majesty". (p.73)

In casting the relationship between the 'speaking' body of Margaret and the commanding Uncle Philip as an encounter between a divided female figure, which largely equates 'woman' with 'body' and a male figure reassured in his sense of identity as a result of this encounter, one possible objection is that a 'decapitated' female figure would better support such a configuration. A headless body would then unequivocally display the requisite identification of 'body'. However, in response it is worth heeding Massé's observation: "Better decapitation, an honest separation of body and head, than being one of the living dead."[43] To be 'chokered' is to be as good as dead, since without a voice the woman effectively has no presence, and yet it is also to be still alive.[44] The state of being strangled or choked, but still alive, proves a more "cruelly disorganised" state than that of the beheaded figure. The chokered figure is presented to convey female expression stifled by patriarchal force, to

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[43] Massé, Michelle A., "Gothic Repetition", *Signs* 15 (1990), p.708.

[44] This unbearably liminal state is at the centre of the nineteenth-century novel, *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The protagonist in Gilman's story watches the women behind the wallpaper "trying to climb through": "But nobody could climb through that pattern - it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads. They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white! If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad." In this instance, the incarcerated woman finds the spectacle of these strangled figures the source of her own distress, while their condition is also a metaphor for the silence that has been imposed upon her. Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (London: Virago, 1981 [1892]), p.30. Massé quotes a more extended passage from the novel.

demonstrate the "speaking" of images, and to embody the gothic agony of the liminal.

Figure Two

> The blood blooms clean
> In you, ruby.
> The pain
> You wake to is not yours.
> - "Nick and the Candlestick", ll.27-30

Male desire read across the female body and a negotiation of female subjectivity are both featured in another of Carter's texts, again through the strikingly gothic image of a woman wearing a necklace. In the short story "The Bloody Chamber" the heroine is seduced into marriage by the Sadeian Marquis and then introduced into a world of luxury and knowledge in which she will lose her virginity. Her sexual education, and the realisation of the nature of her own desire, develops in parallel to her actual exploration of the "Bluebeard" castle, thereby following a conventional gothic plot and reproducing a fairy-tale structure. The sense of dread, disorientation, and the threat of violence all contribute to the story's classification as gothic.

Like Uncle Philip, the Marquis also chooses a necklace as his wedding gift, an obvious sign of ownership and, in this case, a sign too of the intended means of the bride's death: "'Decapitation,' he whispered, almost voluptuously." (p.36) He tells her to prepare for the death scene (as the text announces its own dramatic structure) by putting on the white dress, the classic garb of the gothic victim, as well as the necklace, which, he tells her, "prefigures your end".(p.36) A previous reference to the dress as a "sinuous shift of white muslin" (p.11) points to this reading of her costume as a form of death shroud. The necklace is both exquisite and grotesque: "A choker of rubies, two inches wide, like an extraordinarily precious slit throat." (p.11) Like Margaret's collar, this necklace is a metaphorical reference to marital incarceration, a sign of social death in its inhibition of expression, and an intimation of actual murder. Marked by this simulated gash, "the bloody bandage of rubies" (p.12), the young bride literally displays the appearance of death-in-life.

The short story, then, is haunted throughout by the uncanny appearance of a living woman with a slit throat. The uncanny here is based on temporal difference, arising out of a disruption of history, since the slitting of her throat in one sense has already happened. The necklace refers directly to the post-Terror practice of French aristocrats, who had escaped the guillotine, tying around their necks "a red ribbon like the memory of a wound", and the necklace of rubies likewise was made in this spirit of "luxurious defiance" by the Marquis' ancestors. (p.11) The young bride's opal wedding ring (reminiscent of Margaret's moonstones) is also a memento of a violent and aristocratic past, in that before being owned by the Marquis' grandmother, it once belonged to Catherine de Medici. The past event which the French aristocrats escaped returns in the form of the necklace to prefigure the Marquis' planned violence of the future. So, a sense of the present in "The Bloody Chamber" is poised between a return of the historical moment of the Terror *and* the horror of the climactic discovery of the locked room and her intended death. Both the institutional and personal forms of fear and violence are gothic in their barbarism.

In its message of political and class history another layer of gothic fiction is introduced by the original metaphoric intent of the necklace's design. A strong relation between the emergence of the gothic genre and the effects of the French Revolution is well established in gothic studies, and the necklace becomes a crystallised emblem of that relation. The necklace means that her body is marked with another's history; it is turned into a positive sign of the heroine's defiance in a parallel to the aristos, since she escapes the fate of others like her, including his former wives. Although we know that the repetition means she will not die - sharing the luck of the aristos - the narrative tension is nevertheless sustained by the possibility of violence. Like the ceremony focused on Margaret in *The Magic Toyshop*, it is the acts of repetition (previous wives have been killed before her) which invest this scenario with its sense of menace; as in the tales of Poe, the protagonist is driven unwillingly towards what appears to be a predestined conclusion.

In loading the image of the chokered woman with these meanings we again find the combination of beauty and violence associated with the wife's

body. Her wearing of the jewellery seems to indicate a complicity in the male paradigm of desire delineated in the novel; she adopts or acquires *his* version of desire, becoming the student body of a "Sadian [*sic*] pedagogy [which] depends upon the pupil's virginity": a "blank, empty receptacle" into which another's desires are poured.[45] Marking this 'blank' space, like the marital sheets, is the red stain signifying her loss of virginity, only here it is her body that carries the evidence of this event.[46] Similarly, the fact that the diamond ring becomes stuck on Gemma's finger in *Little Sisters* is a sign that her guilt is "publicly displayed"; Mrs. Helmsley likewise felt that her wedding ring was "a visible token of her virginity, her nightly disgrace. As well hold out the bloody sheets!" (*LS*, p.186) The "Bloody Chamber" heroine is made to wear her necklace like a public declaration in the same way, and the red stain left by the key on her forehead indicates her "shame" (p.41).

Not just the sadist lover, the Marquis also assumes the role of vampire in kissing the ruby necklace, which itself "bit into [her] neck" (p.18), appearing to leave the red gash at her throat. Echoes of the vampiric encounter in Olga Broumas' version of "Sleeping Beauty" similarly conflate a previous sexual encounter evidenced by "lovebites like fossils",[47] and the threat delivered by a male voice: "I will drink/ your blood" (ll.44-5).[48] Together these marks form the semblance of

> a ceremonial
> necklace, suddenly
> snapped apart. (ll.21-3)

The violence of the language employed in these descriptions mimics the

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[45] See Gallop, Jane, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.51.

[46] White sheets and red stains are the central images in Isak Dinesen's gothic short story, "The Blank Page". Cast in the gothic colours of white, red, and black, the scene is described as follows: "a long gallery with a black and white marble floor. On the walls of the gallery, side by side, hangs a long row of heavy, gilt frames...each of these frames encloses a square cut from a royal wedding sheet". Dinesen, *Last Tales* (London: Four Square Books, 1967 [1957]), pp.48-52 (p.51).

[47] l.12. Broumas, *Beginning with O.*

[48] In Tennant's *The Bad Sister*, the vampiric encounter involves two women. In a reflection of herself, Jane sees the 'vampire' Meg's "white neck like a column going up to support a Roman head" and then "Meg's head is tilted to one side, like a statue decapitated at the cherry velvet band - down one side of her face runs a shadow of the deepest red" (pp.128-29).

violence associated with the image; Mercer suggests that the "cropping and fragmentation of bodies - often 'decapitated,' so to speak - is a salient feature of pornography...a literal inscription of a sadistic impulse in the 'male gaze'".[49] The connotations of past and future violence which adhere to the necklace arouse his desire for the new bride - a coincidence between desire and murder which we shall see appears again in Weldon's *Little Sisters*.

In "The Bloody Chamber", the figurative separation of mind and body signified by the slit at the neck underlines both the physical and mental responses which the Marquis elicits in his new bride. The bride finds the castle full of sensory novelty to which she responds inspite of herself, *and* ultimately finds that she "had behaved exactly according to his desires" (p.34) when forbidden to use the key, thus implying that the heroine's 'mind' is not her own. The Marquis' attention to the young girl's neck affects her own self-image; it becomes the point of greatest threat to her and to him (the latter through the history of resistance or escape 'written' on the necklace). Indeed, when the new bride sees herself as the Marquis sees her, she too notices "the way the muscles in my neck stuck out like thin wire." (p.11) This effect of wires beneath the skin gives the bride the appearance of a mechanised puppet, and confirms the husband's role of puppeteer (an allusion which returns at the end when he sees "his dolls break free of their strings" (p.39)). Recalling that "[b]odies [are] unabashedly represented as objects in the Gothic novel",[50] we see that the heroine's objectification, in which she participates, supports the Marquis' identity as master of the castle (while the male characters do not see themselves in this objectified way).

The importance of frames in this process is related to a history of images representing the female body. When the young bride first looks at herself wearing the necklace, she believes she sees herself *as he sees her.* This sight of herself as his Other reinforces the notion that there can be no

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[49] Mercer, Kobena, "Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe" in Apter, Emily and William Pietz (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp.307-30 (p.315). Mercer grounds his understanding of feminist studies of pornography and the "aggression in the act of looking" in Rosalind Coward's "Sexual Violence and Sexuality", *Feminist Review* 11 (1982), pp.9-22. A woman's head is not in fact listed by Coward in her identification of "the codes of fragmentation", p.17.

[50] Columbus, "The Heir Must Die", p.398.

'equal' relation between them, only a relation within the terms of his paradigm of desire. The Marquis watches her in the mirror and the sight of her refracted into several images casts back an image of his own wealth, since this visual effect creates the impression that he has a "whole harem" of brides; she becomes in a sense equivalent to the jewels in the economy of commodification.[51] Becoming aware of the frames of objectification, the young girl begins to invoke them herself: she looks in the mirror and sees "the living image of an etching by Rops" (p.15), apprehending herself through a distinctly male gaze.[52] While inferring that dominant cultural images of women cannot be entirely escaped or 'subverted', Carter's repeated scenes of a young girl staging her own identification with figures from visual art, and then *transcending* them as she develops her own will, may be considered 'feminist' in the manipulation of these figures. Like Melanie, the heroine perceives a 'distance' between a sense of who she might be and the cultural figuration which might represent her, and tries to attach her sense of identity to a stereotype or fixed image in order to be able to recognise herself, to have, as Melanie says of her aunt, "substance". (*MT*, p.37)

Certainly the frames through which this objectification is achieved are conspicuous in their repetition. One such image in "The "Bloody Chamber" appears in an earlier work by Carter: when Melanie is experimenting with various poses in the mirror at the opening of *The Magic Toyshop*, she finds enough tulle "for an entire Gothic Parnassus of Cranach Venuses to wind round their heads". (p.15) Although Cranach's Venuses in fact drape the transparent material across their bodies - both disguising and accentuating their nudity - rather than winding it round their heads, the significance for Carter of Cranach's many representations of Venus lies in their invocation when the heroine of the novel is described, since in Cranach's paintings Venus is naked with the exception of a transparent veil and a red necklace at her

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[51] Carter's use of mirrors is informed by Cocteau. See Kenyon, *The Writer's Imagination*, p.30.

[52] There is little doubt that Rops' work can generally be considered pornographic in its classic configuration of female body on display for visual consumption by a male viewer. One of the most direct references in this story, the etching by Rops (whose involvement with the Symbolists makes his work of immediate interest to Carter) is an entirely more pornographic (and shocking) portrayal of nudity than we find in the Cranachs (discussed below).

throat. (See FIGURE 3) This is precisely the image which returns when Carter comes to write the story of "The Bloody Chamber". For the girl with the Marquis' ruby choker does indeed see herself reflected in several mirrors as a "Gothic Parnassus" projecting the gruesome effect of a "whole harem" which literally inspires her new husband to murder.

In the fiction written by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, it is most often the female body which is the subject of these references to fine art. The place of resistance to and complicity in these structures, reproduced by misogynistic imagery, is the body itself. Focusing these issues, an abbreviated version of the type of chokered figure discussed so far can be found in Carter's *Doctor Hoffman*. In a dream which prefigures his meeting with Albertina, Desiderio sees a black swan with "a golden collar around her throbbing throat and on the collar was engraved the single word: ALBERTINA". (*DrH*, p.31) He knows that the swan is a woman, before reading the name on the collar, when it begins to sing. Although this chokered figure is not silent, her "elemental music" is notably a "wordless lament", and the dream, and her song with it, break "like a storm" at the utterance, in the text, of the single capitalised word on the collar. This relation to language, and the description of "her throbbing throat", raises the question of whether the name displayed is the woman's own, or whether she has been branded with the sign on the collar. For we might read the "throbbing throat" as an image of constrained energy, as in Margaret's case in *The Magic Toyshop*.

Carter's attention in her work to women's problematic relation to 'imposed' imagery, makes the issue of volition, such as that raised by the description of Albertina, in the female 'victim' unavoidable. This issue has been plainly stated by Jacqueline Rose:

> It has never been part of feminism's argument that because an image of femininity can be identified as male fantasy, it is any the less intensely lived by women.[53]

Carter's treatment of female identity and its negotiations of cultural symbolism accords with this view; indeed, Sage notes Carter's debt to the Foucauldian evaluation of power ("it comes from everywhere"), arguing that Carter's novels

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[53] Rose, Jacqueline, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), p.128.


FIGURE 3

challenge any simplistic conceptions of femininity as entirely the inescapable work of patriarchy.[54] It becomes clear then that this is a crucial consideration for a study which scrutinizes images of women in relation to a genre reknown for its dynamic of masculine confinement and feminine victimisation. For it is important to bear in mind that none of these writers subscribes to such a rudimentary model; instead, their fiction reveals a compatibility with Rose's belief that, left unexplored, the "image of the wronged woman can close off difficult areas of sexuality and fantasy for women".[55]

How far silence is an act of complicity becomes a vital question, for in "The Bloody Chamber" too, the silence of its heroine when she is wearing her necklace is appreciable: "he would not let me take off my ruby choker, although it was growing very uncomfortable,...I said, I remember, very little." (p.19) The most telling phrase in terms of the necklace's metaphorical impact is found in a line borrowed from Baudelaire's "*Les Bijoux*": "Of her apparel she retains/ Only her sonorous jewellery."[56] The necklace then is more resonant than any words she might be capable of speaking - it 'speaks' more loudly as a symbol of her state than any vocal expression. She realises too that it was her association with silence which first attracted him to her: "the silent music" of her "unknowingness". (p.19) At the moment when the Marquis is going to turn the metaphor of decapitation into a reality, thus closing the semantic gap between the figural and the literal, and in a sense completing the historical act of the Terror, she is saved by the intervention of her mother.[57] This climax initiates the end of silence: "The unholy silence of the place shattered in an instant." (p.39) Again the period of silence is identified with inaction and

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[54] See Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction*, p.173. Indeed, the writers' use of fairy tales also traverses this territory, as Rowe explains: "romantic tales point to the *complicity* of women within a patriarchal culture", as a daughter often inherits a mother's mode of behaviour in fairy tales. Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales", p.243, emphasis added.

[55] Rose, p.7.

[56] *BC*, p.17. Carter has translated a line from Baudelaire's "Les Bijoux": "*Elle n'avait gardé que ses bijoux sonores*" (l.2). *Charles Baudelaire: Selected Poems*, trans. Joanna Richardson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975 [1857]).

[57] This is commonly identified as one of the feminist revisions that Carter makes in her version of the fairy tale, as a feminine 'principle' is charged with the disruption of Bluebeard's patriarchy. However, Carter's ending of the heroine's marriage to the piano tuner does not support a straightforward interpretation of the story as a 'feminist' statement.

incarceration in a parallel to Margaret's silence in *The Magic Toyshop*, similarly aligned to complicity in a patriarchal world and broken when the 'red people' finally take action against Uncle Philip. The silence of these female characters in Carter's fiction does not easily accord with the notion of silence-as-protest. Instead, the question of female complicity in configurations of heterosexual desire raised by these texts make these depictions far more complex.

An example of female silence as possible consent in a patriarchal formation appears in *Measure for Measure* in the character of Isabella. The play is significant here, not least because of Carter's own interest in it,[58] but because of the imagery through which Isabella expresses her resistance to Angelo's proposal that she sacrifice her virginity to save her condemned brother's life; she tells him,

> Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
> And strip myself to death as to a bed
> That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
> My body up to shame.[59]

In an image similar to Carter's in "The Bloody Chamber", Isabella imaginatively "wears" the signs of violence and sacrifice, as marks indicating the imposition of another's desire, and these appear as rubies, both horrendous in their imitation of blood and beautiful in their regal overtones. The confusion between images of desire and death, organised around the use of zeugma ("strip" for death or for bed), effects the same sort of mortification of the body that is present in "The Bloody Chamber", a mortification in favour of the 'ideal'. Isabella's 'rubies' would signify the security of her honour and the resistance to Angelo's bribe; the Marquis' bride wears the necklace as a mark of *ressentiment*, in that the price of her seduction by wealth is this sign of her sexual capitulation.

The female body imprinted with traces of violent male desire *and* self-violence, becomes a 'text' both on display to others, and *within* which the heroine exists. This construction is continued in the exploration of the gothic

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[58] Sage interview of Carter in Bradbury, Malcolm and Judith Cooke (eds), *New Writing* (London: Minerva, 1992), pp.185-93 (p.188).

[59] *Measure For Measure*, Act II, scene iv, ll.101-04. Talking about her own rereading of the play, Carter mentions the problematic ending in which Isabella remains silent after the Duke's announcement that he is going to marry her.

castle in this modern "Bluebeard" as an allegory for the young girl's discovery of her own sexuality, the nature of her desire. The house itself is full of images of death: the bedroom filled "with lilies until it looked like an embalming parlour" (p.18), the comparison of their stems to "arms, dismembered arms, drifting drowned in greenish water" (p.22), and the discovery of his previous wives dead in the "viscera of the castle" (p.27). This figural imbrication of the house and the body becomes problematic, as the discovery and emergence of a "true" nature or full subjectivity for the female characters in this story and *The Magic Toyshop* necessitates an escape from the state of death-in-life *and* the house itself.[60] What must be escaped are the framing boundaries imposed by another - whether it be the Sadeian patriarch or cultural symbols of womanhood - she must leave the house in order to attain a degree of independence and to express her own desires. The typical gothic device of entrapment and escape acquires explicitly gendered meaning in terms of the containing force. For clearly, in a contemporary gothic context, the experience of the "feminine carceral"[61] is one of self-alienation as a result of absolute complicity with another's view. The metaphors of containment in Plath's poetry, for example, provide a strong indication of alienation from the material body, identified as the "Bottle in which I live", and "this skin/ Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces"[62] - a body, these images suggest, bearing the marks of injury and the paint of performance. Yet a feminist gothic addresses more than ambitions of transcendence beyond bodily immanence; it concerns itself with an acute sensitivity to the cultural language which intervenes between self-perception and the physical body, that is, these "bandages, boredoms, old faces".

Accordingly, Carter's texts do not suggest that stepping out of these frames (or houses) altogether offers a solution to the dialectic of complicity and resistance or, indeed, freedom. The endings of these two texts themselves

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[60] An equation of body and house can sometimes be benign, as in the comparison which Lorna Sage draws between the grandmother and the house in *Wise Children*. Sage, "Death of the Author", *Granta*, p.238.

[61] See Chapter 2, section I.

[62] "Medusa", l.35; "Getting There", ll.65-66.

seem largely unsatisfactory in these terms: Margaret disappears in a fire, and the young girl marries the insipid piano tuner. Like Plath's, Carter's work gives expression to the intractable tension between immanence and transcendence, to borrow de Beauvoir's terminology, or embodiment and (metaphoric) disembodiment. Contemplating both simultaneously ultimately directs our (and the writers') attention to the cultural discursive formations which intercede between the two states.

Figure Three

Like Margaret in *The Magic Toyshop*, Gemma in Fay Weldon's *Little Sisters* has become disabled on her wedding day; in this case, she can no longer walk, or is unwilling to do so. This is the outcome of the story which she relates to the younger woman (the "little sister") as a kind of moral parable, in which, like the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber", Gemma is made to wear a heavy necklace that can only be removed when she is dead. The 1966 narrative in which she appears as the chokered figure describes her own initiation into the world of desire. The novel establishes a gothic atmosphere as context for the young Gemma's loss of innocence. The figure of Gemma now paralysed in the wheelchair - "a living death" (p.219) she calls it - relating a story which may or may not be true but is nevertheless frightening, presents a grotesque presence at the center of the house and the text. The description of the office, which is the setting for the earlier narrative, contains some fantastic and disturbing images. It is there that Marion's face reflects "the daily endurance, daily horror" (p.110), and in a Hitchcock vein, the sense of an ominous threat is created by the persistent sound of birds on both sides of the office windows:

> Sometimes the birds inside and the birds outside would, between them, shatter the glass with the clash of their discontent, and feathers and even specks of blood would fly. (*LS*, p.110)

Images of the grotesque and of violence interrupt the world of the mundane.

Such a combination is often conducted in the novel through a metonymical register similar to the instance cited in *The Magic Toyshop*, in regard to Margaret's moonstones. Gemma discovers "a finger without a hand"

(p.182) wearing a massive diamond in a setting of "naked bodies twined in an erotic chain" (p.183). This is followed by Marion's remark, while Gemma is holding the finger, that Mr Fox is homosexual, and by Gemma's own thoughts about love and having children. Accordingly, a disturbing conflation is made between a dead finger, an imagined penis, and the thought of a baby: "Mr. Fox's baby. Tiny, bright, sharp eyes. Gemma shivered. The feel of the shrivelled object was still between her fingers." (*LS*, p.185) The indistinct nature of the "shrivelled object" in this sequence, and of the "sharp eyes" which may refer to the jewels, simultaneously expresses an abhorrence of maternity and a fear of masculinity, both aroused by the same source: the discovery of the finger in the drawer. An alliance of the grotesque and the humorous, as in this example, also focuses questions of desire in relation to Gemma when she is wearing the rings which Mr Fox gives her.

The intoxicating combination of desire and innocence are expressed in the colours of gothic: "Deep deep red and brilliant white. Rose Red, Snow White." (*LS*, p.184) This fairy-tale allusion to the ruby and diamond rings is a case of the abbreviated formula or "shorthand", which, as we saw in the case of the gothic, the writers sometimes use to refer to a familiar cultural trope. Here the intensity of the colours emphasises the danger which threatens Gemma. The subsequent appearance then of Gemma as a chokered figure coincides with the expected revelation that Mr Fox was responsible for severing Mr First's sister's ringed finger and pushing her out of the window. Gemma desires Mr Fox, both as an imagined romantic hero and for his social class, despite the suggestions that he might be dangerous. In fact this initially makes him more mysterious and desirable to her, in the same way that the Marquis' inscrutability is both threatening and enticing to his new wife. Like the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber", and her fire opal ring which echoes the meanings of the larger ring around her neck, the young Gemma is seduced by the gift of beautiful jewellery *because* of its associations with an unidentified threat. The ruby ring, a "red stone [which] gleamed in a silver snake's-mouth setting" (p.169), which Mr Fox first lends her carries intimations of physical danger through its associations with Miss First's demise. It is a symbol of ownership of Gemma's body ("It marks you as mine" (p.171), Mr Fox tells her);

the diamond ring obviously portends danger since it is only won by Gemma after the discovery of a woman's severed finger. Both symbolise for her the promise of an 'upward' transgression of class boundaries, since she believes the rings' aristocratic credentials are now transferred to her. Class distinctions are also the cause, it turns out, for Mr Fox's violence: "[i]t hurts the poor to wait upon the rich...Humiliation, and the answer to it - revolution and murder" (p.187), so his response is that of the revolutionary. Compared to Red Riding Hood's wolf, to Bluebeard (p.165), and to the bear in "Snow White and Rose Red" (p.211), Mr Fox bears similarities to the fox in Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck* who seduces Jemima (here contracted to "Gemma") to the point of death.[63]

The theme of sexual initiation is again denoted by a necklace, and is ultimately associated with the act of rape. An ordering gaze which measures her body is first evident in the syntax, in a telling selection of fragments: "The romantic intensity of his [Mr Fox's] gaze, the bright eyes searching her *face*, her *throat*, her *body*".[64] The "cruel disorganization" of mind and body divided by the neck is here explicitly outlined. Indeed, until this climactic moment, Gemma's responses have been presented as being caught between that of her 'unreasonable' mind, which denies a rational interpretation of Mr Fox's behaviour, and her virginal body, which responds to Mr Fox's advances. Gemma's desire is shaped by a masculine model, and thereby culminates in the scene, presented with Weldon's characteristic black humour,[65] in which Mr Fox literally measures her naked body with a pair of calipers:

> Mr. Fox measured Gemma's neck, and around it placed a heavy gold collar, on which was embossed a frieze of artistic if orgiastic couplings.
> 'I don't care for it myself,' he said. 'Too heavy and too uncomfortable, I imagine.' (p.210)

As in both of the Carter texts which feature a woman wearing a necklace, and where the potential expression of distinctly female desire is repressed in favour

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[63] Potter, Beatrix, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck* (London: Frederick Warne & Co, 1908).

[64] *LS*, p.165, emphasis added.

[65] That is, humour in which the reader/viewer is asked to move swiftly between disgust and laughter. See discussion of black humour in Chapter 2, in section III on Weldon.

of a male conception of desire, here sex is described in the threatening terms of rape. This forms part of a gothic depiction of marriage as a confining structure, one which traps the woman (in Gemma's case the encounter is envisaged as a prelude to marriage). Margaret's confinement in an austere Sunday ritual with Philip repeats this dilemma, in that wearing the painful collar is identified with her conjugal obligations. Similarly, when the ring on Gemma's finger seems to tighten, it not only works as a metaphor for the increasing tension in the plot, but suggests the closing in of Mr Fox's "erotic circle", in which the heroine is likely to lose a sense of herself as a distinct individual.

These themes are brought together in the "Bloody Chamber", where we find the following description:

> 'There is a striking resemblance between the act of love and the ministrations of a torturer' opined my husband's favourite poet; I had learned something of the nature of that similarity on my marriage bed. (*BC*, pp.27-28)

Such a conflation of desire, marriage, and death in these texts is at the heart of the gothic plot, and is constructed by these writers to introduce the issue of complicity in a patriarchal version of heterosexual relations and specifically in marriage. However, they do not depict the gothic heroines as victims, pure and simple. Gemma's comment about her own desire - "Not such a virgin but that I wasn't born to it" (*LS*, p.167) - introduces the notion that virginity, or even desire, may be thought of as 'natural' *or* as constructed. If the reader chooses to believe Hamish's dismissal of Gemma's story as a fabricated reconstruction of her own desires, then we must read the image of the woman trapped in the necklace as a self-conscious presentation of herself as divided, believing that when young she did not behave as 'herself'. (This act of creative memory may also be a reaction against Mr Fox's homosexuality which makes him unavailable to her and which she may in fact regard as the real threat.) "Nothing kept her there", Gemma realises, "waiting for mutilation and death, except her own nature". (p.205)

In the poem "Daddy", Plath is explicit about the troubling character of these relations, as the female voice acknowledges an act of masochistic complicity:

A man in black with a Meinkampf look
And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do. (ll.65-67)

The parroting of marriage vows in this poem repeats the close affinity between violence and love that we have already seen in contemporary fiction. This depiction of masochistic love, apparently so central to the gothic written by these women, cannot be overlooked and fixes our attention on some very difficult questions. Crucially, the act of rape becomes the focus of these themes (this act occasions a radical disturbance of identity for the female protagonist), and when the heroine feigns innocence of this potential outcome, the treatment of this trope seems to test a reading of this fiction as 'feminist'. Yet, this would be to disregard the challenge of their fiction, which faces up to aspects of desire which sit uneasily in a traditionally feminist view of the world. Thus, in Gemma's confusion in *Little Sisters*, she echoes the young bride of Carter's story when she asks: "Where does one thing stop and another start? Where does desire end and murder begin?" (p.210) As in the other two texts, the act of looking is crucial as an expression of control and as a means of objectifying the woman. While the Marquis placed his bride before the mirror to show her how she appeared to him, in *Little Sisters*, Mr Fox does the same with menacing repetition: "Gemma, look at yourself in the mirror" (pp.170, 209), "Let me see your hands, Gemma." (p.208) Forced in this manner to see themselves framed, the young heroines must confront the imagery of their own bodies.

As a means of establishing an impression of girlish simplicity, before this is contrasted to their sense of knowingness, the heroines' visual perception is shown to be filtered both through fictional references and the matrix of gothic colours. Melanie decides that it is easier to bear Uncle Philip's domination if she regards "him as a character in a film, possibly played by Orson Welles" (*MT*, p.76). Watching Margaret, Finn, and Francie dancing, Melanie interprets their difference in terms of colour: "they were red and had substance and she, Melanie, was forever grey, a shadow. It was the fault of the wedding-dress night". (*MT*, p.77) Positioned between red and white, both in these two sentences and in her self-perception, Melanie sees the colours as expressions of 'real', heightened experience to which she has only momentary

access. Through these colours the text links Melanie's night of awakening sexuality in the wedding dress with her confused feelings of attraction, and repulsion, for the three Irish people. An ironic allusion in "The Bloody Chamber" works to similar effect: when the Marquis takes the heroine to see *Tristan*, she walks, in her "sinuous shift of white muslin" (p.11), through the foyer where the crowd "parted like the Red Sea" to let them through (p.10). The movement of colour, as in this example, expresses abstract notions metaphorically through an effect of painting - here the innocence of the white divides, or enters into, a world of passion conveyed by the colour red.

Confusion persists between the girls' subjective and objective identification in the encircling images of the ring and choker which the female figures wear. Most obviously, the image works as a symbol of marriage. In a feminist view of conventional marriage as the 'ownership' of women, and in terms of gothic capture of the virgin-heroine, to be caught by a figure like the Marquis is to meet death. When Gemma accuses Mr Fox of Miss First's murder - "She got your ring stuck on her finger" (p.210) - she alludes to this euphemism for death. The collar-like necklaces, then, replicate what is a recognised 'shape' of confinement in contemporary women's writing: "The 'O' of the circus ring [in Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, for example] is one such containing image".[66] The ring as a sign of marital confinement makes explicit in these novels the feminist reading of the fairy tale genre, in which the story ends with the heroine's marriage signalling the death of her 'own' distinct life, and which precludes a continuation of her story.[67] The connotations of death borne by the chokered figure in these novels foreground this annihilation of the female self; Mr Fox tells the heroine of Weldon's tale, "Now die, Gemma...That's what it was all about." (*LS*, p.215)

The fairy tale structure then implies both the innocence of the girl's predicament and the guilt of the threatening male character. In the unsettling combination of the childlike and the sexual (as fairy tales negotiate their move

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[66] Sage, *Angela Carter*, p.49.

[67] Winterson, for example, includes a complete rewriting of this ending in her novel, *Sexing The Cherry* (London: Vintage, 1989), by inventing possible lives for the Twelve Dancing Princesses after they have been married against their will to the Twelve Princes.

from innocence to knowledge), the heroines on the one hand express their innocence through the kind of language they use. Gemma imagines her 'real' self as a princess: "though I lie on a hundred mattresses, I can detect the pea beneath them all." (*LS*, p.126) In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie's innocence and fear project her as the heroine of a gothic narrative; she imagines the toyshop as "Bluebeard's castle, it was, or Mr Fox's manor house with...chopped up corpses neatly piled in all the wardrobes." (p.83) The narrative voice associated with Gemma coyly describes Mr Fox as "piercing with his you-know-what - ".[68] By contrast the heroines' innocence also exaggerates images of masculinity. Like Carter's Uncle Philip who is "the Beast of the Apocalypse" (*MT*, p.77), the male character in *Little Sisters* is described as a "beast" and a "predator" (p.211), while the Marquis appears "leonine" (*BC*, p.8).

Yet the containing image does not simply produce as straightforward a picture of gender relations as this suggests. Although a reading which finds that the gothic explores the "proof of women's victimization"[69] is one which might be said to interpret the genre from a female perspective, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon do not subscribe to such easy definitions. As if to confirm Sage's belief that some contemporary feminist writers are engaged in a more sophisticated enterprise than is outlined by such a paradigm, Modleski, for one, points to "self-victimization" as a significant theme in gothic fiction.[70] For in some cases here the heroines' attraction to the necklaces in their elaborate ornamentation becomes a significant factor in discerning the narrative's 'attitude' to the question of victimhood. The artifice of these necklaces is aligned to beauty; all declare, in their decorative effects, statements of class status, wealth, and power. Consequently, the necklace's

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[68] *LS*, p.211. Fairy tale questions are also asked by male characters, such as Mr Fox's feigned stupidity in his exclamation, "How on earth am I going to get that off?" (*LS*, p.210), once he has placed the collar around Gemma's neck (although the reader already knows the answer to this question is decapitation). His 'innocence' emphasises the threat of violence because it is implicit.

[69] Fleenor, p.227.

[70] The gothic heroine is frequently prone to "assuming the victim's role" in pre-twentieth-century fiction according to Modleski, who points to this as an "old plot" in the gothic. However, she seems to imply that contemporary feminist fiction does not need to engage fully with this particular 'tradition' since modern gothics make it clear that women refuse the role of victim. *Loving With A Vengeance*, pp.72,84.

connotations of royalty or nobility in all three figures are noteworthy in this respect: Margaret's makes her look like the Queen of Assyria; "The Bloody Chamber" heroine's belonged to a French aristocrat (and her ring to Catherine de Medici); and Gemma's ring (which is associated with the wearing of the necklace in this case) was once worn by "Katharine, Tsarina of all the Russians" (*LS*, p.169). These allusions establish a relation between sexual desire and desire that transgresses class boundaries. This is a crucial aspect of the female character's attempt to define herself according to context, often negotiating identity through definitions of work, class, gender, and race. So, for instance we find Weldon's protagonist wondering to herself, "Gemma, who are you after all? No one titled, or rich, or black, or amazing." (*LS*, p.160) Finding that these categories do not perceptibly constitute her, she seems to define herself as a romantic heroine in relation to Mr Fox, and looks to the promise of a conventional marriage plot conveyed by the diamond and ruby rings.

Since these necklaces are, at the same time, signs of sexual enslavement, uneasy relations between desire and violence are revealed. In each case the wearer is made to look like a young girl, and the intimation of virginal sacrifice is then followed in each narrative by the act of rape.[71] At first the female character takes pleasure in the metaphoric value of the necklace (and ring) as it suggests glamour, class, or wealth, and then when it is given *literal* reference, the physical pain becomes more evident. The gothic effects (rape or possible death) of the jewellery are revealed through this process of 'de-glamourisation'. So, although the fairy-tale overtones give the impression of feminine naïveté and masculine depravity, the texts also hint at the complicity of the heroine within this dynamic. Accordingly, Gemma welcomes "some essential corruption" (*LS*, p.126), while the Marquis' new bride demonstrates "a potentiality for corruption", and again, "a rare talent for corruption" (*BC*, pp.11, 20). The gothic has always been interested in the murderous consequences of desire, and certainly, Gemma worries that to "love a madman, what does that make of oneself?" (*LS*, p.211)

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[71] In *The Magic Toyshop* the same can be said of Melanie by association with her aunt.

In these depictions of the chokered woman, then, expressions of female desire are identified with images of violence. It is this baroque configuration finally which refers us back to the discussion of the iconography of pictorial representations (see Chapter 2, section IV). For in considering the manner in which this chokered figure behaves as an *optical* 'metaphor-into-narrative', it is instructive to return to Buci-Glucksman's argument that not only does the baroque recur in the postmodern period, but it can also be discerned in the *fin de siècle* of the nineteenth century. The number of visual representations of beheaded figures at this time is truly remarkable.[72] Moreau and Redon (both cited in "The Bloody Chamber"), and Klimt all painted versions of the Salome story; and the latter's *Salome (Judith I)* (1901) provides a useful counterpart to the figure of the chokered woman in contemporary writing. (See FIGURE 4) Particularly instructive in considering how iconography yields meaning, Klimt's painting, according to Bram Dijkstra, combines "a heady mixture of vampire love, high fashion, and the period's obsession with the notion that the headhuntress had desired to obtain hands-on knowledge of John the Baptist's head".[73] The figure's elaborate gold, jewel-encrusted choker, in its central position in the painting and in its pronounced brilliance of colour, 'speaks' of the decapitation which has occurred, the evidence of which, John the Baptist's head, she holds in her left hand. The necklace indicates both her desire and its attendant violence, "reduplicating in a highly distanced ornamentation the severed head", as well as declaring the high social status of the painter's model.[74] The figure of the chokered woman not only shares the tenor of this painting, but also participates in its general aesthetics. It is possible to read Carter's and Weldon's chokered figures in

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[72] Charles Bernheimer points out that there were "hundreds of versions of Salome painted in Europe between 1870 and 1910." Bernheimer, "Fetishism and Decadence: Salome's Severed Heads" in Apter, Emily and William Pietz (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, pp.62-83 (p.66). Bernheimer discusses this figure in relation to the "seminal fantasy of the decadent imagination" - that is, Freud's theory of castration.

[73] Dijkstra, Bram, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.388. Having seen Strauss' opera of Wilde's play, Klimt conflates the Biblical tale with Wilde's more overtly erotic script. The prominent colour scheme of Wilde's play conforms to the gothic patterns outlined in Chapter 2, section III.

[74] Buci-Glucksman, p.154.

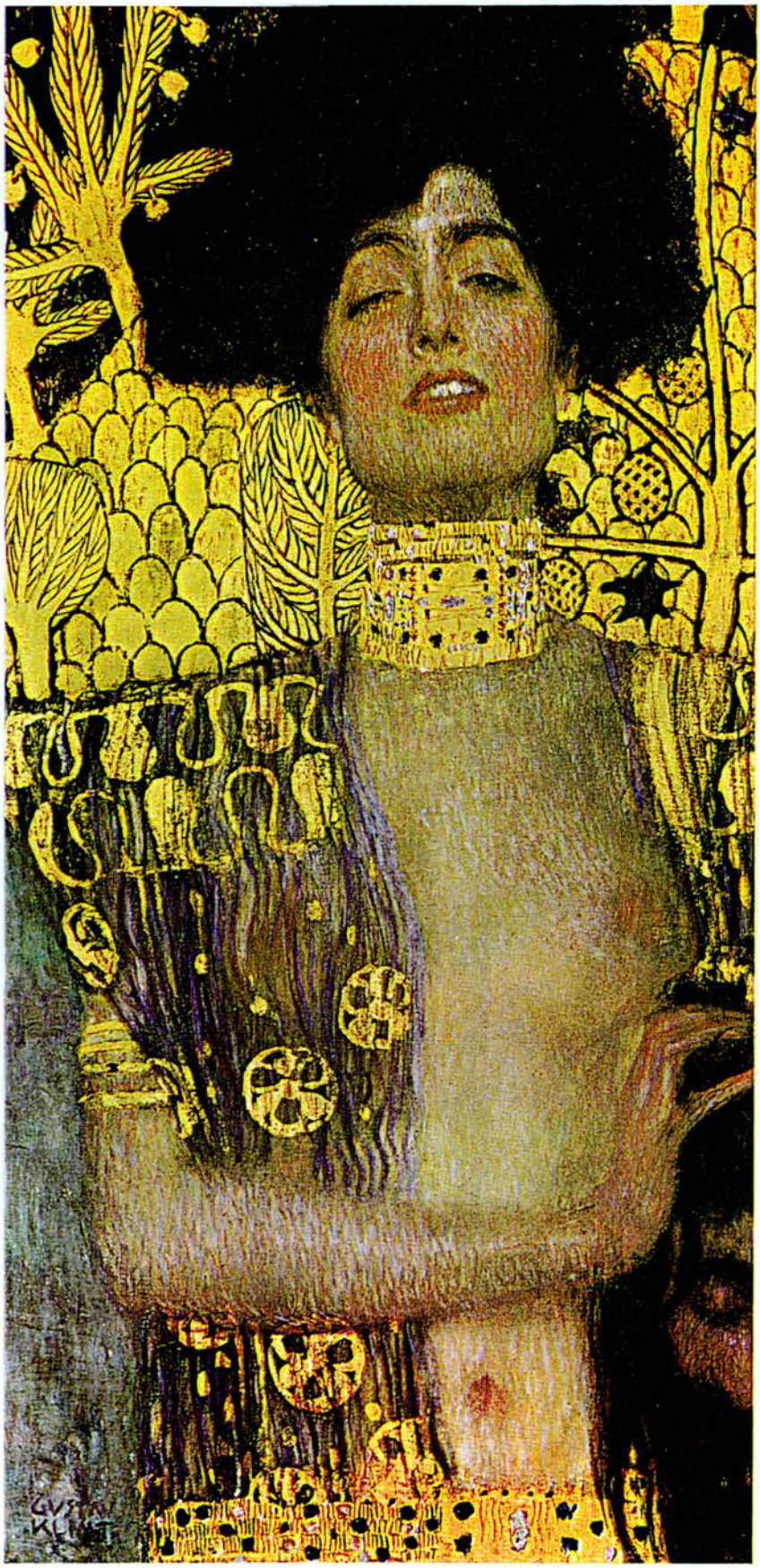

FIGURE 4

comparison to this decadent aesthetics, characterised by the predominance of "artifice over nature, the value of the cosmetic ornament, the sense of art as an enchanting fakery, a surface play of masks and disguises".[75] The similarities are evident between this series of elements and postmodernist traits already discussed (see Chapter 1, section IV), and it is within this painted framework that another gothic figure of decapitation materialises.

## II. History as Gothic Narrative: The Case of Mary Queen of Scots

Just as the images of the necklaces may be read as gothic in more complex ways than simply as a gendered configuration of the mind/body disjunction, the writers' interests in "the role of symbolic systems in human subjectivity"[76] and the ways in which they define and establish identity extend beyond the 'system' of philosophical discourse. At a time when contemporary historiography has acknowledged the fictional aspects of history itself, history becomes another discourse explored by postmodernist writers who show how it has thrown up images and narratives which have remained current in contemporary culture. Moreover, identifying tropes in historical narratives which have been elevated to the status of myth, postmodernist writers also expose, and subvert, a process of mythicisation in history. Particularly relevant to the fictional treatment of the figure of Mary Queen of Scots, this subversion attends to what Barthes has called the "very principle of myth: it transforms history into Nature".[77] Thus, to highlight mythical tropes is to de-naturalise historical narrative.

It is arguable that a series of images and ideas associated with the execution of Mary Queen of Scots (1587) have had a lasting impact on the literary imagination in Europe. Specific meanings became associated with her

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[75] Bernheimer, p.63.

[76] Anderson, Carol, "Listening to the Women Talk" in Wallace, Gavin and Randall Stevenson (eds), *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, pp.170-86 (p.182).

[77] Barthes, Roland, "Myth Today", Sontag, Susan (ed), *Barthes: Selected Writings*, (London: Fontana, 1983), p.116.

name and myth, such as murderess, tragic lover, bewitching, French, Catholic, prisoner. Appearing in Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, the story of the Scottish Queen is also the central allegory in Emma Tennant's novel, *The Queen of Stones*, and clearly has powerful resonance for both writers. A similarity may be posited then between Edmund Burke's casting of the French Revolution as a family drama of parricide which was then represented as a gothic spectacle (notably by political parodies of Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781)), and the way in which the fate of Mary Queen of Scots seems to haunt contemporary literature as the central character in a typically gothic scenario.

Dependent on a reading of cultural context, such interpretations of history as gothic narrative find precedents in the history of gothic itself. Baldick has argued, for instance, that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, among other gothic novels, reflects a British response to events in late eighteenth-century France:

> its story of the creation of a monster emerges from her parents' debate with Burke over the great monstrosity of the modern age, the French Revolution.[78]

The Marquis de Sade also pointed to the "inevitable result of the revolutionary shocks which all of Europe has suffered" in his consideration of the novels of Radcliffe and Lewis.[79] Among the literary, political, and philosophical discourses which addressed the subject, the imaging of the threat from the lower classes as a monster was established by Burke in his representation of the Revolution as a gothic plot. Read as both the abomination of parricide - Burke's account becomes "an Oedipal drama"[80] - and as class transgression, the Revolution had a powerful effect on the cultural consciousness and imagination, as well as the material realities of political and social upheaval. It also entered the cultural economy through pictorial depictions of the events, particularly the threat to Marie Antoinette in her chambers so vividly recounted in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

Similarly, the figure of Mary Queen of Scots belongs to a cultural

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[78] Baldick, Chris, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, p.27.

[79] Baldick quoting from *The 120 Days of Sodom*. Baldick, p.16.

[80] Baldick, p.17.

grammar. Tied to the gothic characteristics of Carter's and Tennant's novels, the figure focuses theoretical questions of identity pursued by these writers in fictional form. Like the events of eighteenth-century France, Mary's imprisonment and execution ordered by Elizabeth I has been represented in paintings throughout the last four centuries, and these contemporary novels call on an expected familiarity with this visual language of history, since specific iconography of her representation has become associated with the legend of Mary, Queen of Scots. Even during her life, a cult of the queen's body was apparent; the white veil she wears in the "*en deuil blanc*" paintings imitates "contemporary descriptions of the translucency of Mary's skin".[81] Through Francois Clouet's "white mourning" portraits painted in her youth - "perhaps the most familiar image of Mary"[82] - the white veil she is said to have worn as her beauty declined became identified with her. Framed by the transparent material, her head appears detached from her body. (See FIGURE 5) Thus, in *Queen of Stones*, Laurie, writing in her journal, envisions her death in terms of her clothes: "The black I wear will turn to white, the white mourning of the French Court."(*QS*, p.65) The queen wore this white veil with a black dress to her execution (depicted in *The Blairs Memorial Portrait* of the early seventeenth-century and reproduced in subsequent narrative paintings, notably Herdman's *Execution* (1867)). In her biography of the queen, Antonia Fraser's description of Mary as she goes to her death similarly conflates this visual image of death and mourning with that of a wedding: "the long white lace-edged veil which flowed down her back to the ground like a bride's."[83] This combination of the bride and the sacrifice to death which meet in the popularly held image of her might explain the cultural resonance Mary Queen of Scots has for some writers, particularly those interested in the gothic genre.

The drama of this historical event is evident in the manner in which it was recorded: in the many drawings of the seating arrangements, resembling a theatre, which formed part of the official account of the execution in the

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[81] Smailes, Helen and Duncan Thomson, *The Queen's Image* (Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1987), p.33.

[82] Smailes, p.31.

[83] Fraser, Antonia, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Methuen, 1985 [1969]), p.631.

FIGURE 5

room at Fotheringhay, the details of her prayers in French, Scots, and Latin (determinedly not in English), and the added horror - or black humour - of the wig which came away from the severed head. Indeed, her story has a history of dramatic treatment.[84] Antonia Fraser has indulged in the same sort of imaginative embellishment which Burke applied to the deposition of Louis XVI - what Paine described as "Mr Burke's drama", the leading characters of which were like "figures in a magic lanthorn".[85] For instance, Fraser's account of the aftermath of Mary's execution includes the following description of Fotheringhay Castle:

> It was as though the castle, cut off from the rest of the world, had fallen asleep for a thousand years under an enchantment, as a result of the dolorous stroke which had there slain Mary Queen of Scots.[86]

This is the language of fairytale and its spells; Tennant's narrator in *Tess* suggests, in fact, that "history lessons must start as fairy tales". (*Tess*, p.47) It is also the characteristic setting of a gothic tale with its isolated castle wherein secret violence has occurred - the horror of "the dolorous stroke". While Stefan Zweig's book too transforms history into a romance novel, Fraser's use of pathos romanticises her subject.[87] Such romanticised treatment in historical biography contributes to the popular conception of Mary Queen of Scots. The double violation of beauty and royalty as transgressions of Burke's "natural law" - as in the case of Marie Antoinette

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[84] Stefan Zweig, who Tennant includes in the "bibliography" of *Queen of Stones*, a dramatist himself, presents his biography of Mary Stuart in the manner of a play insofar as it begins with an outline of the "Acts" and "Chief Persons of the Drama". Zweig, *The Queen of Scots* (London: Cassell, 1987 [1935]).

[85] Paine, Thomas, *The Rights of Man* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993 [1791]), p.30. Paine himself was not averse to the employment of parental metaphors, and reversed the analogy of child-parent relations establishing the aristocracy as the 'monstrous parent', see p.51. The anti-Jacobin writer Godwin also mimicked "the characteristic tropes of Burkean discourse", Baldick, p.24.

[86] Fraser, p.637.

[87] Zweig interprets Mary's motives in this way: "this desire for an enhanced royal state has been forgotten because of the woman's impulsive longing to surrender her body to the embraces of a handsome young man." pp.97-98. Interestingly Fraser further invites comparison between the priest's speech made at the requiem mass in the queen's honour at Notre Dame, describing her wedding day, with Burke's record of Marie Antoinette as dauphiness, "glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy". Fraser, p.638. Fraser's reference to the famous passage in Burke is to his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [1790]), p.75.

where "loyalty to rank and sex" has been discarded[88] - seems to constitute a disturbance of gothic proportions, expressed in the case of Mary's execution in colours of the gothic. Zweig's imaginative description of her clothes for the occasion, of "black velvet" and the "wired white veil", concentrates on certain gruesome details: Mary dressed, he writes,

> with full knowledge that on the scaffold she would be partially disrobed before the eyes of strange men. The petticoat and camisole were of crimson velvet, and she had scarlet sleeves to match, that, when her neck was severed, the spurting blood should not contrast too crudely with her underwear and her arms.[89]

While the first sentence here is reminiscent of Isabella's line, "[a]nd strip myself to death as to a bed", and the implied loss of self accompanying both death and the sexual encounter, Zweig's attention to the sumptuousness of her apparel and to the white, red, and black colours perpetuates the mythic tradition of Mary as *spectacle*. (See FIGURE 6) Her own motto - "*En ma fin est mon commencement*" - emphasises, as Zweig points out, the focus of the enduring cultural popularity of her image, in that her "death was the true beginning of her fame".[90]

Critical attention to the appearance of Mary Queen of Scots in the history of literature has not extended beyond the work of the early 1970s and has only dealt with the use of this figure in European drama.[91] Yet this overlooks its apparent resonance for several contemporary women writers, in particular those who identify themselves as Scottish.[92] Among them, Liz Lochhead takes this as the focus of her play, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*, which shares with Tennant's *Queen of Stones* a treatment

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[88] Burke, p.76.

[89] Zweig, pp.339-40.

[90] Zweig, p.336.

[91] The most recent of these studies is Pearl J. Brandwein's *Mary Queen of Scots in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Drama* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) which notably fails to consider Liz Lochhead's 1987 play, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. Indeed, Brandwein does not include the work of any woman writer in her study.

[92] As Carol Anderson has pointed out, this identification is open to various interpretations, but Tennant's upbringing in Scotland and Carter's father's nationality seem particularly relevant to this use of history in their fiction. Anderson, "Listening to the Women Talk", p.171.


MARIA
D G
SCOTIÆ
PIISSIMA REGINA
FRANCIÆ DOTARIA
ANNO
ÆTATIS REGNIQ
30
ANGLICA CAPTIVIT
10
S H
1578

FIGURE 6

of the royal figure. Lochhead's play concludes with a scene in which the characters of earlier scenes now "stripped of all dignity and historicity", are "transformed to twentieth-century children" and they enact the beheading of Mary as a *game*, including the detail of her wig coming off after death.[93] So, history here slides into the ludic. In Tennant's novel, it is read in traces: "Rings, circles in the grass nibbled by sheep" (*QS*, p.24), while *The Magic Toyshop* confines history to the stage of amateur dramatics. In the case of *The Magic Toyshop*, the invocation of the Mary "myth" does more than convey a sense of threat to Margaret's person, it amplifies the image of the strangled figure, highlighting its imaginative and symbolic impact, since we know the queen was beheaded. It further reveals the tensions within the myth itself which contribute to its compelling endurance: the tension implicit in royalty enslaved. So, we find Margaret described as the "Queen of Assyria" and yet she is trapped in the gothic world of the toyshop. She is compared specifically to queens who were disempowered, defined by their roles in relation to their husbands, and to Mary who was imprisoned for years. Margaret's vulnerability is expressed in the description which closely identifies her with the puppet Philip has made: "What is Aunt Margaret made of? Bird bones and tissue paper, spun glass and straw." (*MT*, p.138) The delicacy conveyed in this image points not only to the manufactured character of the puppet, but also to the fabricated facets of myth itself.

The enduring popular interest in Mary Queen of Scots is directly referred to in Tennant's novel, *Queen of Stones*: "She's the talk of time, the Queen who lost her head." (p.128) Tennant's story takes up one of Moers' points about the twentieth-century gothic written by women in its relation of the trauma experienced during female adolescence. While on a school trip a group of young girls becomes lost, and the extreme behaviour which emerges while they are in a remote quarry, disoriented by the pervasive white fog, soon resembles a "female" version of Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), as Tennant

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[93] Lochhead, Liz, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. pp.63, 67. The play ends with a *visual* emphasis on Mary's head in the stage directions: "*all around Marie/Mary suddenly grab at her throat in a tableau, just her head above their hands. Very still in the red light for a moment then black.*"

herself confirms.[94] Her novel is self-conscious in its psychoanalytic reading of its own plot and in its case histories of the protagonists; the insertion of newspaper accounts, psychological profiles of the principal girls, and the bibliography supplied at the end results in a postmodernist framework for this post-Freudian exploration of female adolescence.[95] The quarry is a space in which repressed material in the girls' emotional lives surfaces or is transferred. Presenting itself as a journalistic/academic account of the events which lead to Melanie's murder by Jane, the novel combines the supernatural effects of a film like Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*,[96] and the analysis of the characters' motives, while describing them in the gothic setting of the quarry.

The white fog is a crucial trope in the establishment of a gothic atmosphere and as such creates several different effects in the text. It belongs to the text's obsession with white related to virginity (Bess, as the Virgin Queen, "guarded, day and night, her virginity" (p.85)), swans (equated with masculinity and desire), and the possible obliteration of identity (entering the quarry initiates this disorientation). Time seems suspended through a confusion of different time periods. The "white sightlessness of fog" (p.13) carries a sense of apocalyptic obliteration: at one point Melanie tells Jane that Laurie has "got the missle for the nukle war an' she made this fog an' everythin'." (p.133) The past suggested by the religious book - missal - and the future/present of technological warfare - missile - are conjoined in this word.[97] The name "Whitehays" ('white haze'), the estate on which Melanie lives in a house haunted by a poltergeist, prefigures the mist in which they

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[94] Kenyon, Olga, *Women Writers Talk*, p.185.

[95] Although Tennant intended in *Queen of Stones*, to "inform people about how girls are brought up to think of themselves and their expectations...showing how society now reads those girls and how they have been indoctrinated", she also points to the different voices of the analyst and journalist for instance as "all done with a tongue in cheek". Tennant concedes, "I don't think I made the fact it was parody clear enough to be picked up." The novel parodies the language of these commentators, then, but the fact remains that the "mythology sustaining the concept of the feminine", although spoken by "a pretty stupid narrator", is significant to female self-perception as the novel itself shows. See Haffenden interview, pp.298, 290.

[96] Weir's 1975 film is based on Joan Lindsay's novel of the same name published in 1967.

[97] A similar passage describing apocalypse occurs in Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, in which an "epidemic of cholera" and "thirty cases of typhus" combine with "tear gas and machine gun fire", p.29.

become lost. Tennant's trope recalls the operation of fog in other texts. The spell intitiated by the arrival of the albatross through the "fog-smoke white" in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is hinted here by the fog "like the underbelly of a great bird" followed by Bess' memory of her father shooting a bird dead (p.32) and by its resemblance of "the wingspan of a monstrous gull" (p.45). The infamous opening paragraphs of Dickens' gothic *Bleak House* are also invoked, where the fog is an image of the "pestilent", amoral infection spreading across industrialised London (Tennant's use of "pestiferous" is similar).[98] Steven Connor offers a productive reading of this last image of fog, arguing that it should be recognised as an instance of metonymic 'process' rather than as a metaphorical substance, that is, "the process whereby signs melt into other signs".[99] Indeed, Connor's reading of this trope in *Bleak House* can be applied to Tennant's text in its relation of the idea of contagion to the ways in which class divisions are transgressed through the metonymic "conductor" of the fog. (63) The interspersion of white fragments associated with the fog works in tension with the ordering structure of the history of queens and suffuses the narrative.

Certainly the fog in Tennant's novel exhibits connotations of infection because of its association with the Posy Tree as an emblem of the plague. The horrific meaning repressed in the song's childish rhymes - "All fall down!" (p.14) - is cleverly revealed by Tennant in a classic act of re-vision. Through this early revelation it is clear that the girls have entered a world in which nothing is as it appears - the language with which they are familiar, through which they understand the world, is revealed to be the popular recording of an historical event, alien to them. Their "panic of Lost" (p.19) is further expressed in a textual tangle of fairytale "scraps" including the gradually disorienting effect of the fairytale forest and its "Hansel and Gretel" threat of consumption: "The fingers of the trees cling to the banks of fallen earth, rotting leaves, knuckles strain to open the oven door and push you in." (p.18) Fairytale parallels persist in the confusion between characters, as they come

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[98] Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1889 [1853]), Chapter One, p.2.

[99] Connor, Steven, *Dickens* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p.60.

in and out of the fog and merge with one another. Her sense of identity in flux, Bess becomes Rapunzel,

> She had let her hair down now, and even in the pale darkness it shone gold, the real thing. Melanie felt blinded, she wanted to climb it, to be pulled into the chamber of Bess's inner eye. (pp.42-43)

Through this identification of Bess with a fairytale character familiar to her, Melanie expresses her wish to be loved by Bess, and to be her. Female friendship is similarly expressed by Candida in *The House of Hospitalities* - she's going to climb "metaphorically up the rope of hair" - in a reference borrowed from the Rapunzel story which Carmen has planted in her mind. (*HH*, p.101) Bonds of sisterhood established through fairy tale (recalling "Snow White, Rose Red" in Weldon's *Little Sisters*) are disrupted by the intervention of male desire. Bess and Laurie are "inseparable" (p.141) until 'Uncle' seduces the latter and they then regard one another as "my sister and my enemy" (p.123).[100] A relationship magnified through "a glamorised view of history" (p.142) associated with the story of the two queens, the girls' subsequent estrangement becomes expressed through this metatextual play.

It is against this background that the story of female adolescence and confused identity is negotiated through a gothic narrative. The title, *Queen of Stones*, refers directly to the power struggle between Bess and Laurie in their imagined incarnations as Elizabeth and Mary, as to who will "reign" over the other girls. That the designated realm is in fact an abandoned quarry on an island, a "hard, desolate, stony place" (p.58), is a comment not just on the events of history and its wars over land ownership, but also stresses the aspects of "play" in this royal game staged in an empty theatre. The title also includes an oblique reference to the Scottish queen in that the "Stone of Scone" is the emblem of the Scottish throne, a performative sign of coronation and the loss of national authority.

As in *The Magic Toyshop*, the reader's expectations are guided by familiarity with the Mary Queen of Scots story, so that the threat to Carter's

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[100] The story of a nameless "Uncle" or father figure embodying the source of threat is one which is repeated in Tennant's work in particular (in *The Bad Sister* and in *Black Marina*, for example) and plays an important role in terms of the gothic, as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5.

and Tennant's heroines is partially created by this allusion. Like the protagonist of Carter's novel, the girls in the quarry in *Queen of Stones* sense that someone as yet unknown will become a victim. As the Melanie in Tennant's novel remembers (ironically, for it is she who will be the victim of events in the quarry), it was on a school trip to the Chamber of Horrors that she saw a representation of the queen's execution, in which the sense of imminent violence is suspended, it is always 'about' to happen: "A very pale neck, and blood on the block, and an axe that looks like it's been falling hundreds of years and could never get there, to sever the neck." (pp.127-28) Frozen in this image of suspense, the queen's beheading declares its mythic status. As Roland Barthes has argued, "the very end of myths is to immobilize the world",[101] and in response, Tennant's story re-activates the petrified imagery of myth.

Within the framework of this gothic place, the fog-filled quarry, and the historical narrative being re-lived by the school girls, questions of subjectivity arise. Lost in a place unknown to them, a struggle to maintain their identity outside any context is inevitable, and the disjuncture between identity and role-playing is obvious in relation to the enacted romance of Elizabethan queens. The inclusion of the young twins locates this same issue of the divided self in a more obvious form. Indeed, it is Melanie's mischievous story about the Wind Man and the "changeling theory" that disturbs the twins, for whom "[t]o be different, to be taken away from the other, is unthinkable", since their identity is based on the belief that "[e]veryone is born the same". (pp.76-78) It is possible to read the latter through a conception of alterity which considers the identity of 'difference' and 'the same'. The character Melanie makes clear the self-consciousness of this structure when she announces, "Difference *is* the game". (p.130)

A poststructuralist understanding of identity based in performance may be recognised in a certain textual layering in Tennant's novel; Tennant's characters exist in an "economy of difference". In conjunction with the novel's self-avowed intention to understand "the mythology sustaining our concept of

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[101] Barthes, "Myth Today", p.145.

the feminine in society" (p.33), Tennant has an interest in the myths which affect the developing psyches of adolescent girls, an interest sourced in the novel's bibliography, and which places the novel's characters in one sense in the position of characters of an extra-textual story - that of psychoanalysis. Another remove from the 'text' of the queens, this additional text serves to create in these characters the effect of distance from an imagined essential 'self'. This is typical of postmodern writing where, as Docherty explains, "[p]ostmodern figures are always differing, not just from other characters, but also from their putative 'selves'...they dramatize their own 'absence' from themselves."[102] The temporal nature of this operation of difference, of continual deferral of 'presence' is underscored by the primacy of the story of the queens - while the girls are absent from the 'real' world, they seem divorced from a sense of their 'real' selves. Their identities are performative. Similarly, Carter's heroine, Melanie, is unsure of her identity when she enters the world of the Magic Toyshop: "she found herself hard to recognise in these new surroundings" (p.58). Tennant's novel explores the impact of these romantic, historical myths on female maturation, describes the disorientation caused by the lack of a fixed identity as a gothic experience of violence and threat, and revisions the mythical character of an historic event through the animation of the Chamber of Horrors scene recalled by Melanie in which the axe is always about to fall, while here it does and Melanie's body is thrown into the sea.

It is the character of Laurie in *The Queen of Stones* which invokes the meanings popularly associated with the figure of Mary Queen of Scots - "the French girl...the martyr, the Catholic Queen" (p.145).[103] Always apart from the group, she represents 'otherness' to the English schoolgirls whose Englishness is exaggerated by the incarnation of Elizabeth I, an embodiment of nationality. When Melanie goes to the cave where Laurie is secluded, she

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[102] Docherty, Thomas, "Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity" in Smyth, Edmund (ed), *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1991), pp.169-88 (p.183).

[103] Laurie's Catholic identification marks her as the 'barbaric' source of threat amongst the girls, an acknowledgment of 'old' gothic's presentation of a contrast between superstitious Catholicism and rationalist Protestantism. See Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*, in which the theological character of the rhetoric of the horror novel is discussed.

encounters the mysterious appearance of a disembodied head: "[s]he could only see Laurie's pale face now, made thin and long by the black hair that was invisible in the blackness of the cave" (p.82), and later, "[t]he pale face, like a white medallion, hung over the missal in the ivory binding, on knees shrouded and almost invisible in the black coat." (p.83) The haunting description of the floating head supplements the character's own identification with the queen; in her journal she transcribes a verse by Mary in which she depicts herself as "A nought, a heart in play,/ Unwished-for ghost". (p.63)

However, Laurie's projected character as the 'foreign' Queen Mary is most interesting because she does not speak. Her silence may be compared to Margaret's silence in *The Magic Toyshop*; they have each become silent in response to trauma, and each is subsequently likened to Mary Queen of Scots. As in the case of Margaret, Laurie's character is expressed *as* and through the iconography of this historical figure. Therefore, like the image of the chokered woman, this figure of Mary Queen of Scots invoked by Carter and Tennant "speaks" as a gothic metaphor.

"Off with her head!": Playing Gothic Games

The image of the 'speaking' yet silent woman, embodied by the chokered figures and allusions to Mary Queen of Scots, in each case is presented amidst repeated references to games. Informed by the postmodernist attraction to the ludic (discussed in Chapter 1, section I), this emphasis on games foregrounds three key and interrelated concerns: the appropriateness of the form of games to the negotiation of the adolescent heroines' experience; the presentation of a postmodernist gothic; and the narrative matrix of performance, surface, and artifice. Like the heroine of "The Bloody Chamber", Gemma's initiation into the world of desire in *Little Sisters* is perceived through the impression of a game.[104] "These are dangerous games you're playing", Mr First tells Gemma in an account of her wilful blindness to Mr Fox's murderous intentions. (p.204) Distinguished by this form of childishness, the heroine's desire appears to be innocent, although the 'end' of the game is guessed by the

[104] Weldon in fact comments on this playfulness: "I enjoy playing games; the most complicated game was *The Little Sisters*." Kenyon, *Women Writers Talk*, p.199.

heroine, and the reader, to be death.

Accordingly, when the Marquis' new wife in "The Bloody Chamber" discovers a book depicting the "Immolation of the wives of the Sultan", she turns the pages "in the anticipation of fear", and the Marquis warns her, "Baby mustn't play with grownups' toys until she's learned how to handle them, must she?" (p.17) The rules of a game are imposed upon the girl's experience of sexual initiation, suggesting that a predetermined fate will follow her participation in this paradigm. To play the game in "The Bloody Chamber" is to follow the course of the familiar gothic plot of Bluebeard, in which the Marquis' wife "behaved exactly according to his desires". (p.34) Only once she has broken the rules, and her mother saves her from decapitation, does she stand outside the Marquis' game: "the king, aghast, witnesses the revolt of his pawns." (p.39)

In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie follows Finn to the abandoned "pleasure grounds", hinting at the purpose of their visit, where classical statues (some decapitated) lie scattered on a pattern resembling a gigantic chessboard. Melanie is kissed for the first time within this ludic grid; entering this space, she knows in advance what Finn will do. Similarly, Bess and Laurie in *The Queen of Stones* defer their anxieties about sexual desire into the drama of the queens. The young twins play a game of chess throughout the narrative, which mimics the two girls' exaggerated enactment of this miniaturised history. When the pieces lie scattered this signals the accumulating chaos: "Bess might have seen, in the trodden-over board and bishops and queens lying in disarray, the approaching insurrection." (p.135)

The fantastic character of these narratives is sometimes reminiscent of the adolescent world of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, another text featuring games as part of a young girl's 'education'. The pleasure grounds in *The Magic Toyshop* contain an "open plateau with a floor of chequered marble, white on black" (p.102), and crossing this chessboard floor, Melanie "religiously adhered to the white squares" (p.103), representing her fears about loss of virginity and of her sense of a real self in this make-believe world, "this bleak nightmare" (p.103) from which she hopes to wake. The "Queen of the Waste Land", a statue of Queen Victoria broken in two, lies in the "dead fun

palace" (p.106) and Melanie becomes associated with it through the scene with Finn. In "The Bloody Chamber", the stain left on the heroine's forehead by the bloody key has "resolved itself into a mark the shape and brilliance of the heart on a playing card". (p.36) This flat, textual quality is indicative of the presentation of the gothic story in terms of a game for children.

The postmodernist preoccupation with artifice and playfulness here frames, and colours, the gothic figure of the chokered woman. Once the Marquis is killed in "The Bloody Chamber", the subsequent return to 'reality' - the heroine is "busily engaged in setting up house with a piano-tuner" (p.41) - infers the distinct ontological status of the game of the gothic narrative, and its associations with specific configurations of desire. To be kept in the world of the castle, the toyshop, Mr Fox's studio, or the abandoned quarry, is to be disconnected from one's own will and instead to be determined by the rules of a game which govern that world, games in these narratives which are supposed to end in death. Stepping outside of the rules of the game - "his game of love and death" (*BC*, pp.35-36) - also highlights the performative nature of the heroine's participation in it.

The game, then, also operates as a narrative strategy; a textual glut of references to games occurs, for instance, in "The Bloody Chamber" just as the narrative climax is about to take place, as if, at the moment when death is threatening, the text forcefully reminds the reader of the artificial nature of the text itself. So, immediately following the mother's interruption of the prepared decapitation scene we find this analogy: "it was as though a curious child pushed his centime into the slot [of a glass case at a fair] and set all in motion." (p.40) Through such an explicit reference to pretence and make-believe - the rules of the game, the roles of the players - the figure of the chokered woman stands within this context as a nexus of textuality and performative identity.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# 'The Sable Venus': Postcolonial Gothic

Black yew, white cloud,
The horrific complications.
- "Little Fugue", ll.14-15

"From the dawn of modern instrumental reason the idea of whiteness has been associated with reason purified of any material body, while body has been identified with blackness."[1] When issues of race are also implicated in the dichotomy of feminine body and masculine mind, discussed in the preceding chapter, further meanings of the gothic emerge. Postmodernist and feminist critiques of the subject converge in their challenge to a universal, transcendent subject of reason; a postcolonial critique enables the reassessment of the subject as it is constructed in representations of the figure of the black female body. The attempt to transcend a shackled body explored in the previous chapter - an attempt which amounts to transcendence "not as solution, but as repetition",[2] marking the limits of the body *and* the limits of symbolisation - shares certain themes with the fiction depicting the black female body, including marriage as gothic incarceration and issues of complicity in constructions of desire. Feminist subversions of some of these cultural paradigms again employ devices of irony, fantasy, and the fractured time frames of postmodernist narrative, as Carter and Tennant use fragments of history and poetry to uncover ways in which the body is positioned in representations of alterity. Within these representations the black body represents otherness, and specifically embodies anxiety, the grotesque, and transgressions of cultural and corporeal boundaries - all of which belong to established colonialist paradigms. The gothic is therefore

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[1] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.126.

[2] Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, p.148.

used by contemporary writers as a vehicle to explore concepts of difference; conversely, but in tandem, the gothic is transformed and developed by these postmodern uses. If we read texts by Carter and Tennant through notions prevalent in postcolonial criticism, then we can discern how the gothic intersects with other conventional narrative patterns, which in turn illuminates transformations of the genre in the postmodern period.

In the scenes of Carter's short story "Black Venus" and the opening chapter of *The Passion of New Eve*, the figure of the black woman is experienced as an absolute Other by a white male character. Carter's fiction explores this relation, first presenting the black figure as grotesque, and then undermining this colonialist and misogynist construction through the black character's use of language, through a self-conscious exaggeration of the familiar structures which support such a relation, and ultimately through the text's censoring of the male character's reading of her body. The urban gothic of Carter's two narratives, set in Baudelaire's city where his 'exotic' woman is kept and in a futuristic New York, describes the disturbed boundaries, claustrophobic locations, and climate of disease which contribute to a world of dislocation, excess, and entropy. These gothic nightmares are nevertheless often alluring, expressed, for instance, in *The Passion of New Eve* in the garish sixties' colours of Leilah's "bright pink milk-shake" and "yellow, brown-streaked teeth". (p.23) In portraying Leilah and Jeanne, Carter provides a gothic scene overlaid with contemporary re-evaluations of representations of race, as they intersect with conceptions of gender and sexuality, and enacts a postcolonial critique of the colonialist ethic. In "Black Venus" colonial discourse is reproduced through Baudelaire's poetry and in the symbolism of western European 'high' art of nineteenth-century painting, while also appropriating Baudelaire's actual poetic language; in *The Passion of New Eve* colonial patterns are evident in the account of an explorer's encounter with the New World.

Set in an imagined ex-colony, Tennant's *Black Marina* also engages with the iconography of colonialism (as in "Black Venus" related to the West Indies in particular), to bring together such gothic themes as incest, taboo, madness,

and violence. The gothic occurs at points of exploration of identity because it is concerned with unstable states; anxiety within gender and cultural relations gives rise to images located in the gothic spectrum. In reference to both of these writers, we might say that a feminist gothic practice coincides with the text's postcolonial reading of representations of race as gothic experiences of disgust, entrapment, and patriarchal determinism.

Although the term 'postcolonial' is usually applied to literature written by the inhabitants of former colonies or by those who identify with the once colonised through racial affiliation or nationality, it is possible to extend this term to include explorations of the representation of the black body by white writers in Britain through Helen Tiffin's proposal of a postcolonial *reading* practice.[3] Carter's and Tennant's interest in the iconography of colonialism, overlooked by critics of their work, seems to arise from textual and socio-political sources: the work of influential literary predecessors such as Brontë and Rhys addresses the consequences of British imperialism in recognition of the colonised Other as gothic secret, while the climate of political upheaval and cultural re-orientation in 1960s Britain was particularly conducive to reconsiderations of national history and identity measured against the imperial past. Indeed as this past gives way to a neocolonialism of late capitalism, the contemporary period sees the development of a "semi-autonomous" cultural politics, characteristic of postmodernism, in which it is no longer ideas but texts that now struggle with one another.[4] Carter and Tennant write *to* the texts of colonial literature and history and their fiction indicates a knowledge of a number of intersecting colonialist discourses which read the body in terms of oppositions - between purity and corruption, the norm and the grotesque. If we then read the trope of the black body in their work through the matrix of postcolonial criticism, this reveals a complex relation between the text and this image, as it both reproduces and, in its ironic representation, subverts structures of colonialist language.

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[3] Tiffin, Helen, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse", *Kunapipi*, vol. IX, no.3 (1987), pp.17-34 (p.23).

[4] Jameson, Fredric, "Periodizing the 60s" (1984) in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, vol.2 (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.178-208 (p.197).

## I. Allure of the Grotesque

There is such a striking similarity between the character of Leilah in *The Passion of New Eve* and that of Jeanne Duval in the short story "Black Venus" that it becomes possible to regard them initially as fictional counterparts in Carter's work. She establishes the figure of the black woman as the embodiment of the Other which either invokes a gothic based on the grotesque, or is placed in a domestic setting or representational frame which positions the figure as a gothic image. Depiction of the two characters as alluring *and* repulsive relies on a series of physical descriptions as well as metaphorical constructions which are common to both of them. The claustrophobic setting of the patriarch's erotic fantasies, gloomy as any gothic house of captivity, is sharply contrasted with the explorer's romantic image of the New World (America and the West Indies respectively) typically figured as a paradise. The "master of the house" (*BV*, p.10) in both cases has the black figure leashed in some way to the room in which she dances for him - by a belt tied to an iron bed in Leilah's case, and by the moorings of an imagined hot air balloon which keep Jeanne bound to her home in the Old World.

Identified as prostitutes and exotic dancers, both Leilah and Jeanne present an exciting mixture of sexuality and illness to the male voyeur-master, the two characteristics becoming blurred in the mind of the beholder. Jeanne has contracted syphilis as a result of an "atrocious mixture of corruption and innocence" (*BV*, p.13), and this in turn echoes Evelyn's account of Leilah's similarly "corrupt innocence" (*PNE*, p.30). In each case, the fear of contagion is palpable in the male character and forms part of the dialogue between Old World and New, as the contaminating effects of contact and the exhilaration of the unknown are risked between two counter spheres: the 'civilized' (gendered male) and the 'primitive' (gendered female). Fear of pollution carries with it an extra-moral dimension in its expression of forbidden contact. Its relation to taboo, according to Douglas, means that the "rules" of pollution and

its circulation are "unequivocal",[5] and any transgression of these fixed rules becomes immediately dangerous. The polluting body then must occupy the position of the Other in relation to the pure, sealed (white) body which survives as an ideal central to modern Western culture.[6]

The associations of disease and moral corruption posited in the black female body were established in the iconography shared by prominent nineteenth-century aesthetic and medical discourses. In this period, "[b]lack females do not merely represent the sexualized female", Sander Gilman argues, "they also represent the female as the source of corruption and disease."[7] The 'Hottentot Venus', surely invoked by Carter in the title of her short story, became a popular emblem of this phenomenon, while the prostitute also embodied an essential female sexuality, one associated with "disease as well as passion".[8] In its conflation of the black female with the prostitute, Carter's "Black Venus" reads back through Baudelaire to the set of discourses which employ an iconography focused on the black female body and on the prostitute in their regulation of female sexuality, and which influenced artists like Manet whose work is directly and indirectly introduced into Carter's text.[9] Gilman deftly outlines the origins of these allusions, and while Carter's imaginative use of these prominent tropes does acknowledge their nineteenth-century sources, she also shows how relevant and pervasive such allegorical constructions are in twentieth-century colonialist and anti-

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[5] Douglas, Mary, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p.155. Douglas argues that our ideas of cleanliness do resemble certain symbolic rites in older civilizations, while dirt avoidance in our culture is based ostensibly in questions of hygiene and aesthetics. Most importantly for Douglas, "where there is dirt there is system", since dirt is matter out of place. (pp.47-48)

[6] As Susan Bordo points out, "we have come to expect, not thinner bodies, but tighter, smoother, more 'contained' bodies." "Reading the Slender Body" in Jacobus, Mary (ed) *Body/Politics*, (New York, London: Routledge, 1990), pp.83-112 (p.88).

[7] Gilman, Sander L., "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn, 1985), pp.204-242 (p.231).

[8] Gilman, p.221.

[9] One of Manet's most famous paintings is cited on p.20, while the picture of Jeanne and Baudelaire together repeats the encounter between naked native woman and clothed European discoverer, and the image of the hot air balloon, a metaphor for the suspended time of the narrative and their state of social limbo, comes from contemporary sources such as Nadar, Redon, and Manet, all contemporaries of Baudelaire.

feminist rhetoric, indeed in the cultural grammar of western Europe generally.

As the black female body is determined here by the definitions of the grotesque as an aesthetic category, the implications of this for the formation of identity and for subject/object differentiation are considerable. The fact that Evelyn is initially attracted to the grotesque quality of the "beautiful garbage-eater" (*PNE*, p.18) is an indication of the complexity of the aesthetics of the grotesque itself. Apparently capable of arousing sexual desire, it is also conclusively tied to images of alienation and repulsion. While critical perspectives on the grotesque in art and literature can vary greatly, Carter's work is noticeably influenced by one of the most prominent theorists of the grotesque, Mikhail Bakhtin.[10]

Bakhtin's definition of what he terms 'grotesque realism' is located in his reading of Rabelais and is dependent on a set of images which describe a transgressive body - one which emphasises the lower stratum, takes pleasure in bodily functions, and embraces an interrelation of death and birth. He describes this grotesque body as open, protruding, secreting, a body of becoming. To quote from *Rabelais and His World* (1965),

> In grotesque realism...the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people...The material bodily principle is a triumphant, festive principle.[11]

Certainly an emphasis on the conspicuous corporeality, particularly the "lower stratum" of both Jeanne and Leilah (the latter "dreamily agitated her clitoris with her forefinger" (*PNE*, p.26)) may lead us to such a positive interpretation of this "black venus", in whom the erotic and grotesque coincide. The picture of Jeanne's public urination (she "straddled the gutter, legs apart, and pissed" (*BV*, p.20)) and her likeness to "those beautiful giantesses" (p.12) likewise points to a possible means of recovery by Carter of Baudelaire's objectified muse as the physical subject of her own narrative, even a representative of her

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[10] Carter herself commented on the popularity of Bakhtin's ideas in the 1980s. Quoted by Marina Warner in "Angela Carter: Bottle Blonde, Double Drag", Sage, Lorna (ed), *Flesh and the Mirror*, p.254.

[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.19.

own "folk" culture. Since Bakhtin's concept addresses the marginal status of the realm of the carnivalesque, Carter's centering of the figure of Jeanne comments on the hierarchy implicit in the relation between official culture and its repressed elements and enacts an imaginative recovery of the repressed history of a woman who has only been represented in the 'authorised' verse of a French poet, what Molly Hite has called a feminist articulation of the "other side" of a dominant cultural narrative.[12] Jeanne's clownish posture - "She arched her back so much a small boy could have run under her" (*BV*, p.14) - is the epitome of the grotesque movement of the body according to Bakhtin, in which the upper and lower strata are inverted, like the cartwheel which figures a rotation of the earth and sky.[13] However, Bakhtin's emphasis on a "cosmic, ancestral element of the body" is problematic, open to charges of idealisation.[14]

In her consideration of a *female* grotesque, Mary Russo has criticised Bakhtin, noting that he

> fails to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender in his semiotic model of the body politic, and thus his notion of the Female Grotesque remains...repressed and undeveloped.[15]

Her point is that the female body is already displaced, occupying a marginalised position in society; the body which is female *and* grotesque must be recovered from a place of double exile. Similarly, we might extend this argument to note that Bakhtin's category does not account for racial difference either, and Carter's 'heroine' speaks from this further remove within European culture, "articulating the margins, or what has been projected as the margins"

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[12] Hite, Molly, *The Other Side of the Story: Structures and Strategies of Contemporary Feminist Narrative* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.3. Tennant similarly uncovers histories of real or figural imprisonment and silence, such as that of Camille Claudel, "thirty years locked away in an asylum, 'mad'". Tennant, *Sisters and Strangers*, p.175.

[13] Bakhtin, p.353.

[14] Bakhtin, p.323, and see Holquist's prologue to this edition, xix. Pam Morris also notes the "utopian" aspects of *Rabelais and His World*: "Bakhtin's reference to "the folk" or "the people" remain surprisingly unspecified and ahistorical." Morris, Pam (ed), *The Bakhtin Reader* (London & New York: Edward Arnold, 1994), p.22.

[15] Mary Russo, 'Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory', in de Lauretis, Teresa (ed), *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988), p.219.

from more than one cultural perspective.[16]

However, despite the critical attention devoted to the 'Bakhtinian' aspects of Carter's fiction,[17] her use of the grotesque is far more complex than this allows. Neither Bakhtin's logic of the cultural center and its margins, nor Russo's feminist amplification of his model can adequately accommodate the province of the grotesque in Carter's work. In directing attention to the representational practices which envelop and express the female body and female desire, Carter does not simply reproduce a common feminist celebration of the 'monstrous', carnivalesque woman. Such a reading of the female grotesque body ignores Carter's engagement with a significant discursive tradition. For Bakhtin himself makes a distinction between the grotesque he locates in Rabelais and a modern, *negative* meaning of the term. The "post-Romantic" definition of the grotesque as the description of alienation, isolation, and marginalised irregularity corresponds to the kind of physical difference featured in Carter's black female characters.[18] Moreover, an understanding of the grotesque as negative accords with its manifestations within a colonial paradigm.

This negative value attached to the modern understanding of the term, as its popular use to indicate disgust with the unfamiliar attests, makes for a reading of the grotesque similar to that which is often found in southern American gothic (Carson McCullers, for example, has explored the lives of

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[16] Connor, Steven, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of The Contemporary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p.232. Connor's qualification here underlines how simplistic the equivalence of "female" and "marginal" can be - particularly in relation to Carter's fiction.

[17] Morris, for example, brings the two together in her discussion of the carnivalesque. See Morris, Pam, *Literature and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp.156-57. See also Johnson, Heather, "Textualizing the Double-Gendered Body: Forms of the Grotesque in *The Passion of New Eve*, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* XIV (Fall, 1994), pp.43-48.

[18] My use of the term 'post-Romantic' is taken from Bakhtin who has chosen it to distinguish between a modern understanding of the term 'grotesque' and the much earlier meaning grounded in the social reality of the Middle Ages. I realise that this distinction is by no means an absolute one and exceptions do exist in the post-Romantic period. And there is a problem of course in strictly demarcating two specific understandings of the grotesque; indeed it might be possible to regard the Rabelaisian body as 'negatively' grotesque in contrast to the prominence of the sealed, hygienic body of the late twentieth century.

those regarded as 'freakish' and marginalised by society).[19] An avowed textual pleasure in this meaning of the grotesque based on somatic manifestations of difference, does not inevitably lead back to the carnivalesque world which Bakhtin celebrates. Rather, this seems to me to be a crucial identification of the modern gothic: that the effect of repulsion created by the grotesque is not used as an end in itself for the effect of horror or cultural catharsis, but to highlight instead the fascination we feel for difference even while it excites fear (a phenomenon Diane Arbus explores in her photographs of "freaks"[20]). More pointedly, this modern grotesque conveys a set of negative values within a cultural discourse, such as the symbolic language which underpins the colonial dynamic in its prescription of modes of alterity.

Among Kayser's delineations of the grotesque as an aesthetic category is its exploration of "the estranged world",[21] a world not silenced or repeatedly denied as in the carnivalesque, but imperative and present to the subject who stares directly into the eyes of the stranger from that world. The figures of Jeanne and Leilah represent this "other" world to the male characters; several differences are manifested in the relationships of both couples, and all are familiar dichotomies inherent to Western culture: white/black, male/female, wealth/poverty, civilized/primitive, master/slave, writing/speech. The second terms of these distinctions mark the black female body not only as objectified and debased in comparison to its male counterpart, but they also designate it as an expression of 'the abject' *for* this counterpart - that which must be distanced from him in order for him to maintain the 'shape' of his identity. Here the grotesque is directly relevant to

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[19] For an exemplary discussion on the grotesque in Faulkner, see Schwab, Gabriele, "The Multiple Lives of Addie Bundren's Dead Body: On William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*" in MacCannell, Juliet Flower (ed), *The Other Perspective in Gender and Culture: Rewriting Women and the Symbolic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp.209-42.

[20] Moers uses Arbus' work as a reference point for McCullers' characterisation: "Arbus' photographs of freaks - her drag queens, lesbians, circus people, adolescents, lunatics, dwarfs, and the rest - look as if they might have been designed to illustrate McCullers' fiction." *Literary Women*, p.109. A partial explanation for this sense of fascination is offered by Arbus herself: "Most people go through life dreading they'll have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They've passed their test in life. They're aristocrats." Bosworth, Patricia, *Diane Arbus: A Biography* (New York: Avon, 1984), p.207.

[21] Kayser, Wolfgang, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weissten (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981 [1957]), p.184.

the individual and not restricted to an account of Bakhtin's "folk".

One of the key terms in the work of Julia Kristeva, 'the abject' may usefully be applied to the apparent function of the female body when presented as a corrupt, material entity as it is in these texts by Carter. Essential to the formation of a stable sense of identity, the abject and its basic tenet have been aptly summarised by Butler:

> This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. The construction of the 'not-me' as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject.[22]

The construction of this subjectivity is negotiated through the following oppositions, "Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality",[23] all of which seek to regulate the body. Like the series of binarisms mentioned above, these oppositions are in fact perceived as hierarchical, carrying positive and negative values, and are present in the discursive fields cited by Gilman (such as science and the arts) projecting a Eurocentric vision of the black female body. The abject, then, is signalled in Carter's and Tennant's texts by grotesque imagery, and the fear which this arouses of somatic transgression, loss of identity, and racial contagion heralds an articulation of the contemporary gothic.

Within the dynamic of the central relationship of white man/black woman in *The Passion of New Eve* and "Black Venus", the black body as grotesque is established by its avowed qualities of putrefaction and disease. Habitual consumers of hashish, the black women have "rotting" teeth (*PNE*, p.26) of "black stumps" (*BV*, p.13). Their skin colour itself is associated with degeneration and corruption; in the nature of the brown-skinned medlar fruit to which Leilah is compared (p.25), the pleasure of consumption is seen to be dependent on a condition of rottenness. Jeanne knows she is a "secretly festering thing" (*BV*, p.13) and Leilah, the "beautiful garbage eater" (*PNE*, p.18), seems threatening to Evelyn because of the assumptions he makes about her nature: "her slow, sweet flesh has suffused my own with its corrupt

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[22] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, p.133.

[23] Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.16.

langour." (p.37) Leilah's origins seem to be the New York streets of "rubble and excrement" (p.21) where Evelyn, disillusioned in his expectations of a bright New World, feels the weight of "a lurid, Gothic darkness" (p.10) all about him. Jeanne's birthplace is a comparable perversion of paradise, a "stinking Eden" (*BV*, p.9), and in a classic colonialist reading of history, it is implied that she has carried its fetid nature with her to France. Jeanne smokes "small, foul, black, cheroot[s]" (p.10) and had first aroused the Frenchman when she "straddled the gutter, legs apart, and pissed".(p.20)

The eventual 'collapse' of the black female body seems attributed to its own nature, as if it were the inevitable conclusion of its tendency to atrophy. When Baudelaire imagines Jeanne stripped of her clothes and her flesh, this act of fantasy is seen to work in the same manner as her urine, "the bodily acid that burned" (p.20) - an agent produced by Jeanne's own body. She is thereby transformed from the subject of erotic desire into the very picture of a gothic revenant: "now she walked beside him like an ambulant fetish, savage, obscene, terrifying." (p.20) The violent effect of his imagined 'strip tease' of her body reveals the male poet/artist's gaze in this instance to be a destructive, essentialising force, and one which concludes with the epitome of 'primitive' otherness - she is "savage".[24] Disease and age finally make her actual appearance hideous. Once she has returned to the Caribbean, her body undergoes a material disintegration: her hair and teeth fall out and "[h]er face would terrify the little children". (p.22) Such descriptions are in sharp contrast to Jeanne's role as muse; within Baudelaire's poetry and its romantic vision of the West Indian woman, the grotesque materiality and prescience of mortality are repressed by, or add erotic dimension to, the beautiful "Creole

[24] The 'otherness' of this figure is relevant in a humorous scene in Tennant's *The Crack*, when a woman covered in mud, "[w]oman symbolized by the primeval slime" terrifies onlookers, one of whom responds in pompous, measured tones: "the people you see here naked and savage as they are, are the reflections of ourselves...the other side of the self and other", pp.76-77.

Lady".[25]

In *The Passion of New Eve*, images of the 'primitive' are similarly associated with disease. When Leilah is reduced to a "broken thing...with its life oozing out of its abused femininity" (*PNE*, p.35), Evelyn's sense of responsibility for the results of an horrific abortion is 'tempered' in his narration by mention of the Haitian "Voodoo abortionist" in Harlem, the "dark petals" (p.34) of her face which close up against him, and by his view that, like Jeanne, she "reeked of a *savage* perfume that was her own entirely".[26] The "sickness of the ghetto" (p.37) is ultimately inferred to be the cause of entropy. All of these correlations suggest that the perversion of the body is a 'black' experience. Leilah's characterisation as a "slave" (pp.29, 31) coincides with Evelyn's disenchanted perception of the New World as a corrupt paradise of sensuous pleasure. Once a projected image of the sensual, Leilah's body then seems to naturally collapse in on itself, as maternity becomes associated with disease and horror (from this extreme male perspective), and she returns in a cab "awash with blood" (p.35) from the operation. Turning away from this grotesque figure in order to disassociate himself from any identification with it and to find an elusive sense of a 'true' self, Evelyn drives west to the desert, his essentialist notions of gender identity briefly unsettled by Leilah's performances but restored by the forceful reminder of her physiology.

This relation between the concrete and the abstract (as the body becomes a register for extra-corporeal meaning) is further underlined by Carter's word play. Leilah's incarnation as "ghetto nymph" (p.21) provides a subtle example of the condensed form of language repeatedly found in Carter's

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[25] Carter's story is partly fabricated from Baudelairean imagery, especially poems such as "*Le Chat*" and "*À une Dame Créole*". The combined threat of death and desire is evident in his poem "Lethe" (referred to in "waters of Lethe" (*BV*, p.17)): "*L'oubli puissant habite sur ta bouche*" (l.15), translated as "Upon your lips dwells great oblivion". *Charles Baudelaire: Selected Poems*. Another makes the connection between prostitution, disease, and death, which is present in Carter's revision: "*Une Charogne*" ("Carrion") describes "a disgusting corpse... /With its legs in the air like a lewd woman's/ inflamed and oozing poisons", and the poet addresses the woman, "tell the vermin which will devour you with their kisses,/ how I have immortalized the image and the divine/ essence of my putrified loves." *Baudelaire: The Complete Verse*, trans. and ed. Francis Scarfe (London: Anvil Press, 1986), pp.91-92.

[26] *BV*, p.35, added emphasis.

work, what Jordan has called "something like *zeugma*",[27] which can reveal within a single phrase the tension implicit in metaphor itself: here between the real and the fantastic, the visceral and the imaginary, the bodily and the disembodied. This is evocative of the semantic 'twilight' in which these bodies appear: one moment they are overwhelmed by their own materiality, and the next they operate as metaphoric vehicles for the transmission of cultural meaning. It is through this compound function of language that the grotesque body is both repressed in its sublimation in a form of the ideal and yet shown to be simultaneously essential in its abject state to the stability of the male poet/subject. Indeed, the material condition of the grotesque body cannot be wholly transcended here, nor does the poet's vision of that body succeed in fully repressing the material source of the poetic image. In this paradox, Carter's fiction reveals a perception of the female body shared by Plath: the apparent contradiction which Rose identifies between the realisation, "I cannot undo myself", and the repeated attempt to do so by "stepping from this skin of old bandages".[28]

This alliance of material immanence and aspirations of transcendent 'purity' finds a parallel in one of the central allegories in *The Passion of New Eve*. Just such a confirmation that the black figure represents the grotesque comes in its role within Carter's schematic use of alchemy and its intricate symbolism. The attraction of alchemical imagery for a writer such as Carter lies in its rich material of colourful images, emblematic scenes, and baroque myths. Carter extends this interest to include an exploration of the gendered nature of the discourse of alchemy itself, since, like Jung, she seems to point to "the signal connection between our modern psychology of the unconscious and alchemical symbolism", and specifically to its relevance to "the formation

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[27] Jordan, Elaine, "Enthralment: Angela Carter's Speculative Fictions", p.24.

[28] Rose, p.148. Quoting Plath's "Getting There", ll.38, 68-69.

of symbols in general and the individuation process in particular".[29] As if to confirm the contemporary cultural currency of the gendered aspects of alchemy's symbolism suggested by Carter, abjection as a means to resurrection is characterised by Kristeva herself as "an alchemy that transforms [the] death drive into the start of life, of new significance."[30] This perception mimics the movement toward purification within the alchemical process.

In *The Passion of New Eve* Carter loosely patterns the narrative after the principal stages described in alchemical theory: the *nigredo* is embodied by Leilah; a state of 'chaos' persists in the apocalyptic vision of New York and the desert beyond; Tristessa's glass house is an exaggerated version of the hermetic vessel in its manifestation of a "spherical or circular house of glass";[31] the *chymical* wedding of Sol and Luna and the resultant manifestation of the hermaphrodite are obviously recreated by Eve and Tristessa in their moment of physical union; the piece of amber which Eve discovers in her surreal trip underground is a common symbol of alchemical gold; and the finale of Carter's novel contains echoes of the cosmic diagrams setting out the relations of the four elements which are ubiquitous in alchemical treatises.[32] Positioning Leilah as the "nigredo" within the system of alchemical metaphors - Evelyn believes that "the crucible of chaos delivered

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[29] C.G.Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2nd ed. 1968 [1955]), p.37. The philosophy of alchemy is, to a certain extent, unmasked in the novel, and its status as a narrative itself is revealed. In this, Carter follows Jung's disentanglement of the scientific and religious contents of alchemy in order to posit a relation between this symbolism and that of the unconscious. Indeed, Carter's emphasis on the language which structures alchemy effects a kind of de-mythologizing of the alchemical narrative itself - a practice which is similar to her well-known treatment of the fairytale. If it is the case that these documents of alchemy have been considered to be of "the greatest value in regard to the formation of symbols in general and the individuation process in particular", then surely we must regard Carter's fictional play with this symbolism as a parallel to Jung's re-examination of it, as well as to Freud's reinterpretations of the tales. Marie-Louise von Franz (ed), *Aurora Consurgens: A Document Attributed to Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Opposites in Alchemy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p.3.

[30] Kristeva, p.15.

[31] The *domus vitrea sphaeratilis sive circularis*, *Theatrum Chemicum* (1622) vol.5, p.896, cited in Jung, C.G., *Psychology and Alchemy*, p.236.

[32] See for instance De Jong, H.M.E., *Michael Maier's* Atalanta Fugiens*: Sources of Alchemical Book of Emblems* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969). Carter cites Maier in the alchemist Baroslav's library.

her to me for my pleasure" (p.27) - reinscribes this body with intimations of earthiness, the *prima materia*, and baseness.[33] This confirms and accentuates her embodiment of the grotesque while censuring the male character's narrative voice because it consigns her to such an interpretation.

Although the most elaborate use of alchemy is found in *The Passion of New Eve*, the allegory is also invoked in "Black Venus" when, acting *upon* Jeanne's body, Baudelaire's imagination is defined as "an alchemical alteration on the healthy tang of her sweat." (p.19) Carter draws a parallel between the poetic process as a transformation of base material into an expression of the sublime and the alchemical series which begins with the *nigredo* and finds its ultimate form in gold or the philosopher's stone, a physical expression of metaphysical enlightenment. Both Evelyn and Baudelaire approach the black female body as a material *nigredo* which they consume and then transcend in order to achieve either self-knowledge or poetic fame. 'Purified reason', to use Young's term, places itself in opposition to and repudiates the contaminated body;[34] it is reassured of its own self-presence through a negation of this body.

Yet the relationship between black and white presented so far is not so straightforward as the distinction between the grotesque and the 'normal' might suggest; the figure of the 'double' hints at complications in this dichotomy. Such a role of the black female body, described in grotesque terms, as prerequisite to white, male self-realisation is not unique to gothic of the contemporary period. Hurley's study of late-Victorian popular fiction and its gothic elements has indicated the prevalence of similar images of deviance and abjection commonly based on race, gender, and class difference. She cites the indistinct form of the body presented in this fiction as the source of a sense of abjection, which "denotes the simultaneous recognition and denial common

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[33] In fact this is not a contemporary innovation. As Dixon has shown, in a study of Bosch, "in alchemical illustration Negroes and Moors symbolized the putrifaction [*sic*] stage of the Work when all the ingredients, having 'died' and assumed a fully blackened state, could be reduced in a hot fire". Dixon, Laurinda S., *Alchemical Imagery in Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), p.42. Dixon also points to the feature of three principal colours in alchemical imagery: black, red, and white. (p.40)

[34] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, p.125. Young describes "a purified abstract idea of formal reason, disembodied and transcendent."

to the Gothic with the Doppelgänger motif".[35] Similar ambiguity of bodily definition, creating a tension between attraction and repulsion, "recognition and denial", exists between the characters of Jeanne and Baudelaire, and Leilah and Evelyn; in both cases a confusion of identity occurs at the borders of their bodies, expressed in their sexual relations, creating difficulty for the male character's formation of identity. Evelyn's experience of "suffusion" with Leilah's "slow, sweet flesh", makes explicit the difficulty of rendering his own subjectivity as distinct from an Other. For in Leilah's embodiment of the Other, he also finds an embodiment of himself: "I wanted to blame my disease upon somebody else and so I chose Leilah, for she was the nearest thing to myself I had ever met." (*PNE*, p.37)

This relationship of doubled identity follows the pattern of so many literary "doubles" in its confused exchange between good and evil, only here the opposition is conducted along gender and racial lines. The "myth of the succubus" is Evelyn's means of interpreting Leilah's sexual behaviour when he identifies her as one of "the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints." (p.27) In order to divorce the "evil" part of himself and be free to explore the "landscape of [his] heart" (p.41), Evelyn consigns everything that he regards as negative to the black female body. Leilah's function in this respect is "perfect", for, "like the moon, she only gave reflected light". (p.34) This 'mirror' of flattery and affirmation, not mimesis, allows him to see himself as different to her.

A "shining accomplice of assassins", the moon (here described as "sickle", that is, crescent-shaped *and* diseased) is also painted black in Jeanne's story, in which she bears a likeness to "the source of light[,] but this was an illusion; she only shone because the dying fire lit his presents to her." (*BV*, p.12) The strings of glass beads to which this refers create an effect of reflective brilliance which affirms her male partner's self-identity, just as Leilah's appearance dazzles Evelyn. Yet Jeanne and Baudelaire's relationship is less formalised than this might at first suggest; a more nebulous interaction between them is evident in a passage describing their sexual encounters as

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[35] Hurley, Kelly, "The Novel of the Gothic Body: Deviance, Abjection, and Late-Victorian Popular Fiction", PhD thesis (Stanford University, 1988), p.26.

"untangling together the history of transgression". (p.21) Their mutual addiction is imitated in the text as the agencies of their respective voices weave in and out of the narrative:

> she will hold him to her bosom and comfort him for betraying to her in his self-disgust those trace elements of common humanity he has left inside her body, for which he blames her bitterly, for which he will glorify her,...The moon and star vanish. (pp.21-22)

This exchange ends in a loss of identity for both Jeanne and Baudelaire, imaged throughout the story as the moon and the star respectively, and also signals Baudelaire's death. Carter seems to suggest that each is incarcerated by the other in some way, but textual emphasis is given to Jeanne's sense of entrapment by her fatally diseased body and by the poet's sense that it "is made of a different kind of flesh than his." (p.19)

In addressing the crisis of the subject, Kristeva's formulation of the abject means that the effect of the abject is traumatic, it is "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[36] It is located in bodily experience as the subject negotiates a sense of identity in relation to the border of its body. The confusion suffered by Baudelaire and Evelyn when they become entangled with the black female character speaks to this process of disengagement from the Other body which signifies death, disease, and impurity. The representation of the body as gothic declares the anxiety aroused when the borders which seem to maintain a stable identity are threatened, questioned, or transgressed; confrontation with the Other necessitates a "surface politics of the body" as a means to contend with "a discourse of primary and stable identity".[37]

The figures of Jeanne and Leilah represent an "other" world to the male characters in Carter's texts on two levels, which may be distinguished as the individual (fear of gender transgression) and the cultural (fear of racial transgression). First, as women they are seen to embody the Other in terms of their gender and sexuality. The identification of the female body with a

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[36] Kristeva, p.4.

[37] Butler, pp.135-36.

sense of the abject points to the means by which the male individual identities are negotiated. In each case, erotic performance is associated with a fetishizing of the black female body. Second, the women are read as metaphorical figures within a colonial paradigm of New World/Old World which emphasises cultural difference. Indeed, both of these fictions replicate the dynamic which is fundamental to colonialism, as Carter's characters mimic the colonial paradigm, the familiar allegory of the colonial encounter.

Baudelaire and Evelyn first define their *gender* against the black female body. As a grotesque figure the latter is repelled in an effort to establish a 'normalized' masculinity. Mapping out the gendered language in the contrast between nature and artifice - woman "is a being at one with nature in a fleshly complicity that, he insists, is the most abominable of artifices" (*BV*, p.20) - Carter's text does more than comment on the construction present in Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*, between clothed men and nude women. It in fact imitates Baudelaire directly, for he wrote in *Mon Coeur Mis a Nu* (cited in Carter's story): "Woman is *natural*, that is, abominable."[38] The sexual relations of Carter's characters also project the female character as a "fetish", a further gesture towards the demarcation of gender difference. As Bernheimer comments, in his reconsideration of Freud's interpretation of what was originally an ethnographic term, "[t]he fetish serves in fantasy, to make woman up,...to disguise through artifice the discovery of the horrifying mutilation that defines her 'natural' difference", and even as it "acts as an impenetrable barrier to the perception of female castration...it remains as a kind of permanent 'memorial' to that perception."[39] Leilah's nightly transformation into a technicoloured "Rahab the Harlot" (*PNE*, p.29) with her "fetishistic heels" is performed within this logic of the fetish. And it is for this reason that Baudelaire's apparition of Jeanne as an "ambulant fetish" is both erotic and terrifying; her incarnation as such both conceals her 'nature' and reveals its difference. The relationship described in "Black Venus" is seen to be a dramatization of "the fundamental *ambivalence* of colonial fantasy,

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[38] Quoted in Bernheimer, Charles, "Fetishism and Decadence: Salome's Severed Heads", in Apter and Pietz, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, pp.62-83 (p.67).

[39] Bernheimer, p.64.

oscillating between sexual idealization of the racialized other and anxiety in defense of the identity of the white male ego",[40] when confronted with such a phantom of otherness.

That the abject cannot be completely disengaged from the position of "I" is borne out in the entanglement of their physical relationship described above. Related to perversion, "the abject lives at the behest of dying"[41] and the world of "Black Venus" is poised at the very edges of extinction, as sex is inscribed with the transmission of death, the "true Baudelairean syphilis". (p.23) As death is the ultimate threat to identity, Jeanne embodies a state which arouses fear and fascination in Baudelaire, and which allows him to reassure himself of his own existence. The precarious nature of Kristeva's subject - "I am at the border of my condition as a living being"[42] - is discernible in the relationship of Baudelaire and Jeanne as each provides the other with the border of that condition.

This interdependent relation and its relevance to the Other of colonial discourse (in which the coloniser's identity often becomes confused with that of the colonised), is figured in the image of the shadow. Baudelaire's presence - enlarged by his poetic fame perhaps - is so overwhelming that Jeanne seems to disappear: "His shadow could eclipse her entirely". (*BV*, p.12) Blanked out by his shadow, she is identified *as* the shadow to his presence. Leilah is similarly "black as the source of shadow". (*PNE*, p.18) The alterity of the female body is here directly attributed to a female "lack". Whether a lack of the "phallus" or a lack of "substance", distinctions between male and female have been widely theorised in these terms. As we saw in the previous chapter, de Beauvoir describes in the female a lack of rational subjectivity following Sartre (and Descartes), while Irigaray argues that the concept of "substance" is itself a discursive effect and the female lack of it is thus an illusion. So in the scene in which Evelyn repeats the fact that Leilah "was black as my shadow", we find Carter pointing to this reading of the female body, positioned

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[40] Mercer, Kobena, "Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe" in Apter and Pietz (eds), *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, pp.307-30 (p.312).

[41] Kristeva, p.15.

[42] Kristeva, p.3.

within "a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures",[43] when Evelyn examines "the exquisite negative of her sex". (*PNE*, p.27) In psychoanalytic terms, the negative is "exquisite" because the lack of the phallus, a structuring principle in human sexual relationships, is seen to act as a spur to desire.[44] Yet, Carter's apparent familiarity with these theoretical positions means that the male character is not presented as whole or unified by contrast, since according to Lacan,

> there is only the search for the Other that reflects and constructs the absences each individual feels inside and which are phantasised as fulfilling the desires that have had to be repressed.[45]

This may account then for the mutual need suggested in some of the descriptions in "Black Venus"; certainly we find the language of Evelyn's narrative informed by this model: "she [Leilah] had mimicked me so well she had also mimicked the fatal lack in me...[and] I saved myself from that most brutal of all assaults, the siege of the other." (*PNE*, p.34) Here the shared lack leads to a stand-off of mutual desire and rejection. Nevertheless, the "eclipse" of Jeanne's identity and the "negation" of Leilah speak to perceptions of gender and race which have precedents in specific cultural and historical contexts. Carter's feminist interest in gender configurations means that the female lack is explored in this materialist context and in relation to the specifics of language; these images then can be noted particularly for their function as allegory and for the fact that the construction of self/Other, presence/lack are themselves markedly expressed in terms of black and white.

## II. The Cultural Abject

Kristeva's term is apposite in relation to the *cultural* definitions of otherness inherent to colonial discourse as well as to the process of individuation. Abjection in this context stands as "the other facet of...ideological codes on which rest the sleep of individuals and the breathing

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[43] Butler, p.9.

[44] See Sarup, Madan, *Jacques Lacan* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp.122-23.

[45] Sarup, p.123.

spells of societies. Such codes are abjection's purification and repression."[46] In Carter's story, Jeanne embodies a return of this repressed, a disruption of the appearance of purification, an appearance fixed in Baudelaire's verse. Just as Carter points to the de-materialised nature of "Our Lady of Sorrows" as a symbol, even though the female body seems present, this resurrection of Jeanne's history underlines the effects of cultural codes, including the poet's vocabulary, and the material they seek to control and repress.

Consequently, the abject is relevant to considerations of the ideological codes of colonialism, particularly its representations of race, as it embodies the unconscious drives which must be sublimated to uphold the "breathing spells of societies". For Young then, the issue of race may be approached using Kristeva's concept, and she argues that

> Xenophobia as abjection is present throughout the history of modern consciousness, structured by a medicalised reason that defines some bodies as degenerate.[47]

However, as in the case of the individual subject who fetishizes the gendered and/or racial other, this sense of repulsion cannot be completely disengaged from an accompanying sense of attraction at the level of cultural discourse. Indeed racial stereotyping has been characterised as a fetishistic projection of those things which are disavowed by the colonial self.[48] The repetition of the disavowed material is suggestive of the compelling role of the Other and the complex nature of the abject, at once grotesque and eroticised. The encounter with the black body within this symbolism of identity formation presents it as the shape of the gothic Other, the embodiment of a strange and wonderful difference.

"Black Venus" directly refers to a moment in imperialist expansion[49] refracted through a postmodernist narrative technique, and in playing with the colonial past and its images, in turn enacts a postcolonial reading - that is, an

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[46] Kristeva, p.209.

[47] Young, p.145.

[48] JanMohamed argues that the colonialist "fetishization project" permits a "rapid exchange of denigrating images". JanMohamed, Abdul R., "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", *Critical Inquiry* vol.12 (Autumn, 1985), pp.59-87 (p.72).

[49] The British and French colonisations of the West Indies are conflated in Carter's story.

exploration of the *discourse* of colonialism (manifested in the human sciences and the arts). Carter's text thereby intersects with feminist cultural criticism in its focus on the power of representation and the colonising forms of language used to define the Other. We are here reminded, too, of Barthes' assertion in the previous chapter that myth reads history as nature. The postcolonial reading within the text of "Black Venus" is managed through an intertextual engagement with Baudelaire's poetry and, like the non-fictional practice of postcolonial literary criticism, unlocks a canonical text from this revisionary perspective. Similarly, a familiar example from feminist literature is Jean Rhys' fictional 'reading' of *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where this perspective intersects with the gothic genre in the character of Bertha Mason, the Creole woman imprisoned in the attic. Furthermore, the combination of factual account ("slavery had been abolished without debate throughout the French possessions by the National Assembly in 1794", for instance (p.16)) and heavily symbolic language in Carter's treatment of the character Jeanne Duval, reflects the fact that postcolonial criticism addresses the position of women in colonialist representations from two angles which are not mutually exclusive: as metaphorical expressions which constitute the central allegories of empire and as material bodies in history. This dual engagement is noticeably similar to the feminist reappraisal of the language of philosophy, with Carter's texts demonstrating an interest in 'woman' as metaphor and as historical subject.

Baudelaire's own perception of Jeanne and the West Indies can be sited within the discourse of 'Orientalism'. The Orient's function for Western Europe in this period is, as Edward Said claims, "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other."[50] One particularly resonant image for French writers and painters was the Oriental woman, such as Flaubert's Egyptian courtesan, of whom Said says, "she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her."[51] Baudelaire's representation of Jeanne Duval in *Les Fleurs du Mal* can

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[50] Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1978]), p.1.

[51] Said, p.6.

be seen precisely in these terms.[52] Consequently, Carter's revision of this dynamic, taking Baudelaire and *his* Orientalized courtesan/muse as its subject, works to unravel this double bind of the Other, based as it is on both gender and race. As we have seen, the figure of the courtesan is central to many nineteenth-century representations of the cultural Other. "The colonial mentality which sees 'natives' as needing control", Gilman argues,

> is easily transferred to 'woman' - but woman as exemplified by the caste of the prostitute. This need for control was a projection of inner fears; thus, its articulation in visual images was in terms which described the polar opposite of the European male.[53]

Carter's black prostitutes, identified with the stereotypical equation of blackness and sexual excess, refer to such visual images in their articulation of this colonial Other. Carter's text first acknowledges this binary construction of sexualized female and 'civilized' male, as well as its corresponding visual tradition (such as the reference to *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*); the story then attempts, through various strategies, to break open the relation between artifice and historical subjectivity.

In her recognition of the black body's iconographic importance, Carter repeats in both texts an image which consciously points to the body's role as a "legible space".[54] The male character literally attempts to explore the nature of the Other, to get inside her in order to gain knowledge of her and thereby to have power over her. This metaphor is invested with a sense of menace by the intimation of corporeal invasion, the attempt to uncover what is hidden, and conflates constructions of gender (heterosexual relations) and race (explorer narratives). In *The Passion of New Eve*, Evelyn adopts this explorative role: "I made her lie on her back and parted her legs like a doctor in order to examine more closely the exquisite negative of her sex" (p.27), and in "Black Venus", Baudelaire is characterised in the same way: "He himself

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[52] I am aware here that specificities exist within colonial and postcolonial discourse, and that constructions of "The East" cannot be mapped onto the "West Indies" as if they are completely equatable concepts or geographies.

[53] Gilman, Sander, "Black Bodies, White Bodies", p.237.

[54] De Certeau, Michel, *The Writing of History* trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.232.

always wore gloves of pale pink kid that fitted as tenderly close as the rubber gloves that gynaecologists will wear." (p.20) In his critique of historiography, and specifically the anthropological discourse of Jean de Lery's sixteenth-century account of his Brasilian travels, Michel de Certeau points to a powerful hermeneutic effect, characteristic of explorer narratives treating first encounters with the New World:

> The frenzy of knowing and the pleasure of looking reach into the darkest regions and unfold the interiority of bodies as surfaces laid out before our eyes.[55]

The curiosity directed towards the black female body in Carter's texts echoes this spatial component in Lery's interpretation of the native Tupi women. Such a mapping of female interiority into a legible space enhances the explorer's knowledge of the New World; the body comes to signify the geographical space itself and the investigation of its interiority, a search for an essentialised "nature" of otherness. The gothic is implicated in this configuration in the disturbing violation of boundaries between self and Other; the 'inside/outside' relation common to gothic literature is aligned to a dichotomy of horror and attraction located in the figure of the female body.

In exploring a specifically feminist use of the gothic, it is important to consider just how far Carter's narrative goes in subverting such constructions of otherness, and whether she ironises stereotypical depictions of the black female body which might be regarded as the gothic centre of the story filtered through its postcolonial design. Does Carter inadvertently re-enact an orientalizing of the black body in her incorporation of it into the allegory of alchemy and in its identification with the grotesque? For, as JanMohamed warns,

> [t]he power relations underlying this model [manichean allegory] set in motion such strong currents that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who indeed may be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex.[56]

The dangers of feminist and postcolonial revisions are evident; in the repetition of earlier forms the application of irony or parody must be deftly managed at

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[55] De Certeau, p.232.

[56] JanMohamed, p.63.

the risk of 're-orientalisation'. Carter emphasises the effect of friction between old and new, believing that we cannot completely escape certain symbolic structures nor do we always want to. (Carter's reproduction of certain patriarchal paradigms of heterosexual desire raises the contentious issue of female complicity, for instance.) Once the narrative has established that the correlation of black body and the grotesque serves to forward the idea that the gothic is often driven by a patriarchal perception of the female body, a perception sustained in colonial discourses, this view of the body is challenged by the overt naming of its source and context as Tennant does in *Black Marina*: "patriarchal imperialism". (*BM*, p.22) The principal strategies of resistance in Carter's text include ironising familiar forms of representation, reference to contemporary notions of subjectivity such as performative identities, employment of a postmodernist fantastic narrative technique, and the accentuation of an implicit relation between speech and writing.

Considering references to visual representations provides a means of assessing Carter's position in relation to a postcolonial politics. Mercer notes the sense of irony produced when a member of low social class (and a member of a colonised race) enters representation through one of the highest genres in Western art history,[57] the crossing of high and low culture being a central interest of postmodern fiction and feminist politics alike. Jeanne Duval, as the muse figure in Baudelaire's poetry, becomes absorbed into the visual languages of mythology and high art, compared to familiar figures from the tradition of European painting, notably Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Manet's *Olympia*.[58] Women writers often describe the experience of entrapment, "by rooms, walls, gender restrictions - even the body itself",[59] and Carter extends the impression of gothic incarceration into a broader aesthetic whereby the

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[57] Mercer, p.324.

[58] Gilman argues that Manet's *Olympia* (1863) made a linkage in the nineteenth century between "the icon of the Hottentot female and the icon of the prostitute". "Black Bodies, White Bodies", p.206. The intertextual sources in Carter's writing for the figure of Olympia are various. Evelyn's pursuit of Leilah in *The Passion of New eve* is indebted to Robert Desnos' *La Liberté ou l'amour!* Desnos' description, which does not involve violence to the girl's body, includes "the Olympia of my nights". *Liberty or Love!*, trans. Terry Hale (London: Atlas Press, 1993 [1927]), p.77.

[59] Walker, Nancy, p.114.

image of the female figure trapped in allegorical art forms, here in poetry and painting, might be seen as a pictorial expression parallel to the confining frames in which the traditional gothic heroine is held.

The entrapment of specific allegorical meaning (that blackness signifies degeneracy, for example) has preoccupied those feminist and postcolonial critics who address the cultural representation of both women and the subjects of empire. Thus, the prescriptive and pervasive nature of these constructions is addressed by Tiffin's argument, equally applicable to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, that the canonical text of *Robinson Crusoe*

> was part of the process of 'fixing' relations between Europe and its 'others', of establishing patterns of reading alterity at the same time as it inscribed the 'fixity' of that alterity, naturalising 'difference' within its own cognitive codes.[60]

Carter consciously employs the conventions of this alterity but questions their privileged position and their means of representation. The placement of Jeanne in the frame of the text and Carter's engagement with traditions of representation, both literary and visual, is comparable to the codified depiction of the black male body in the work of Robert Mapplethorpe.[61] Thus an allusion to Botticelli in "Black Venus" brings with it the codes of western European myth and Renaissance painting, both traditions which intersect with Baudelaire's poetry in the representation of the Venus figure. Carter's own colouring of the mythic scene ironises these traditional frameworks:

> A scallop-shell carried her stark naked across the Atlantic; she clutched an enormous handful of dreadlocks to her pubic mound. Albatrosses hitched glides on the gales the wee black cherubs blew for her. (*BV*, p.18)

While risking a "re-colonisation" of the black figure by insertion into a Western European form, Carter's treatment offers a playful embodiment of just such a naturalisation of difference effected by a colonialist perspective through the visual 'reconciliation' of the Other into a logic of the 'same'.

In addition to literature and the visual arts, discursive frames which

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[60] Tiffin, Helen, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse", p.23.

[61] See Mercer on the relation of white artist to black subject. He supercedes his own earlier argument which attends to the dangers of "re-colonisation" and finally argues for an ironic statement from Mapplethorpe similar to Carter's practice.

encode the black female figure also include historical narratives of the colonial period. One of the most noted histories of the West Indies, and therefore a likely source for the background to Carter's story, is Bryan Edwards' *The History Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies* (1793). One of the principal documentary accounts of colonial government in the Caribbean, Edwards' study provides statistics of slave numbers, distinguishes between the material conditions of blacks and mulattoes, and, in the 1801 edition, includes illustrations of native vegetation and of encounters between the colonisers and indigenous people. One illustration, however, is conspicuous in its exclusively decorative, rather than documentary, purpose. A poem entitled, "Ode to the Sable Venus", is accompanied by a picture which "colours" a figure closely resembling Botticelli's Venus.[62] (See FIGURE 7) Immediately preceding Edwards' discussion of the slave trade which brought Africans to the West Indies, the textual decorations of the poem and the illustration stand in marked contrast to the study's general character. A double sense of irony, not dissimilar to Carter's own, appears to operate in this instance. Edwards romanticises the figure of the black woman through the classical allusion, but with some degree of irony since her depiction as Venus is so far removed from the material circumstances that Edwards' study describes of West Indian black people in that period. A significant detail of Stothard's illustration is the ribbon which the Venus figure holds, for it is not possible to tell whether she is in command of the dolphins or being led by them into slavery. In "Black Venus", Carter similarly plays with the idealised, allegorical function of the black body while juxtaposing it with an account of Jeanne's physical condition and material circumstances in order to expose the tension between the metaphorical and the literal. Carter both ironises the

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[62] Thomas Stothard, the literary illustrator, provided the picture for Edwards' poem. Edwards was critical of the barbarity and slavery he witnessed. The *Encyclopedia Brittanica* (4th ed., 1810) entry for "Negro" includes Bryan Edwards' assertion that" [s]o degrading is the nature of slavery, that fortitude of mind is lost as free agency is restrained" (p.754). Nevertheless, an extract from his poem neatly, and amusingly, demonstrates the colonialist logic of the 'same':

> The loveliest limbs her form compose,
> Such as her sister Venus chose,
> In Florence where she's seen.
> Both just alike, except the white,
> No difference, no - none at night,
> The beauteous dames between.

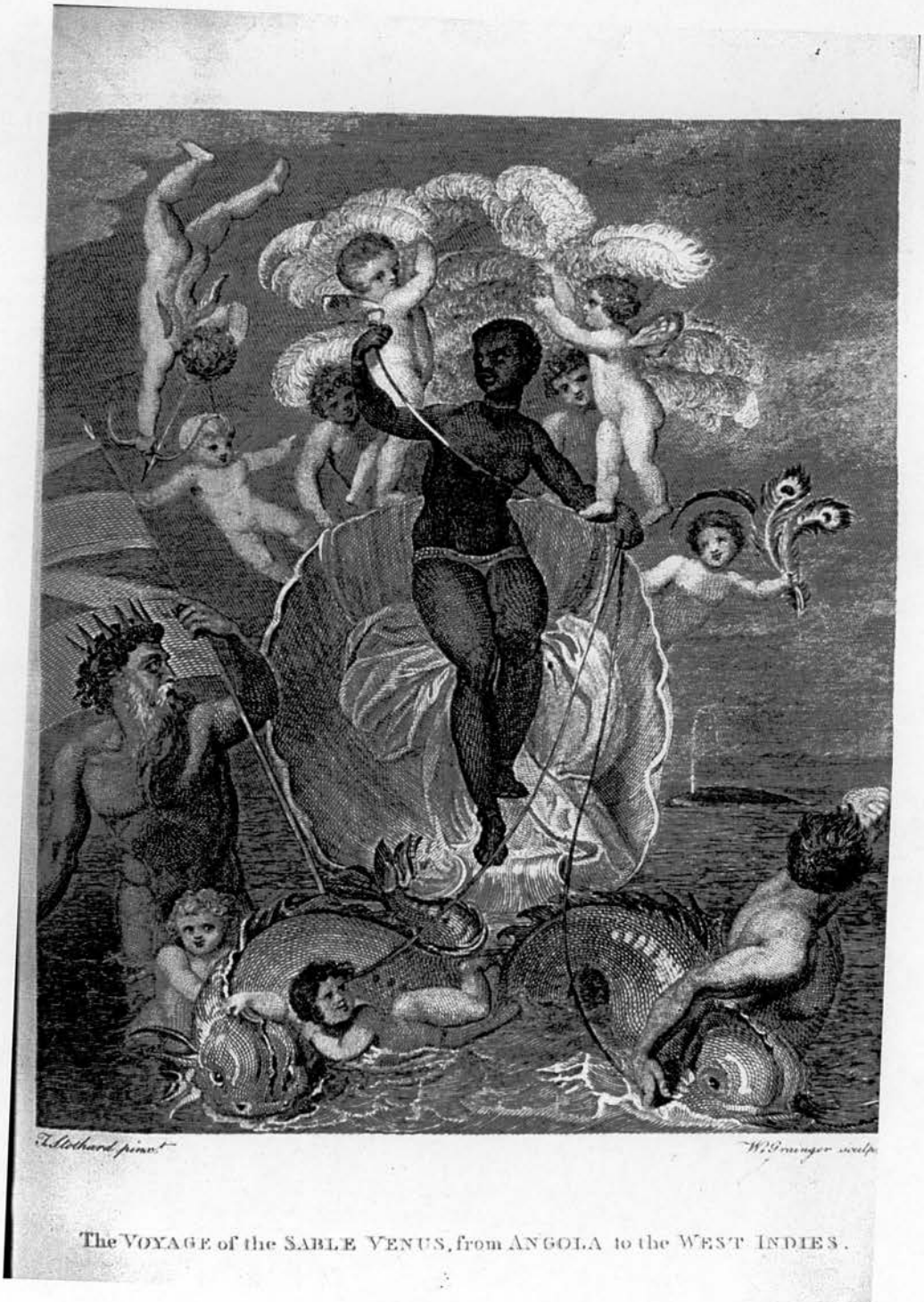
T. Stothard pinxt
W. Bromley sculpt
The VOYAGE of the SABLE VENUS, from ANGOLA to the WEST INDIES.

FIGURE 7

idealising effects of the original Botticelli, including the valorisation of 'whiteness', and highlights the patriarchal frame of Baudelaire's verses. The writer's own comment on the imagined difficulty of being a female muse - "the *symbolism* put on one's frail shoulders!"[63] - captures this complex relation. While a total exemption from language is of course impossible, the allegorical language applied to Jeanne is shown to be restrictive, an imposed and universalising reading of the body. Resistance to this does not necessarily mean the alternative is a hidden "truth", an internally structured subjectivity, but simply that identity is not reducible to a nexus of discourses irrespective of individual volition. The identity model based on a strict dichotomy of exterior and interior is disrupted in Carter's story, replaced with an aesthetic aligned to a "surface politics of the body".

Disrupted too are the reader's expectations of metaphoric patterns supporting further conventional models of identity. The "Chinese bells of that liquid cascade" (*BV*, p.20) which Baudelaire imagines in the scene of Jeanne's public urination parodies his persistent drive to transform the mundane into the highly metaphorical language of the sublime and imprint the scene with yet another "orientalising" image in the "Chinese" bells. His poetic inclinations create images which reflect his own status. While allegorical representations of the colonised land are frequently rendered as the figure of the black woman in colonial discourse, Carter responds to this image with a simple reversal in the account of Baudelaire positioned as the familiar 'soil', "as if he were her vineyard". (p.21) An interesting counterpoint to the intimation that Jeanne is equated with "dirt" (since she does not show it, she must *be* it (p.15)), this image reverses expectations of customary metaphorics and of the Romantic sublime's analogy of nature and the female.

Carter calls on the currency of nineteenth-century iconography of the black body, which, as Gilman has shown, was prevalent in the aesthetics of art, medicine, and literature. Despite the metonymical alignment of disease, blackness, and femaleness presented in some of her work, Carter takes the historical facts - it is believed that Jeanne Duval died of the pox - and

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[63] Carter quoted in interview with Anne Smith, "Myths and the Erotic", *Women's Review* 1 (Nov. 1985), pp.28-29.

imaginatively attributes to Baudelaire's mistress a mode of revenge for her colonisation as muse and indigenous West Indian woman. Carter transforms the analogy of blackness and disease into a textual revenge. In this instance, the return of the repressed Other takes the form of irony and of "true Baudelairean syphilis" as Jeanne's body is invested with agency (which she has been given by her captor); the historical fact of her illness is reclaimed in a feminist move as a perverse source of legitimation for a postcolonial subject.

It has been suggested that the mode of narrative which Carter uses to convey this world of fluidity, that of magic realism, is often used by postcolonial writers as a counter-discursive strategy for subverting colonialist narratives.[64] In Carter's case, the magic realism of her writing is imbricated with the gothic and its diseased sexuality, dark enclosed spaces, and apocalyptic view of the future. The fantastic allows for a representation of subjectivity which is mobile, managed through a narrative which is refracted into different time periods. A textual strategy such as this perpetuates the notion that identity is not irrevocably 'fixed', but is temporal and elusive.

Carter's representation of the black female body comprises a postcolonial interpretation in its indication that 'true' identity of the black character lies 'elsewhere'; Leilah and Jeanne *evade* colonialisation through the strategy of performance. If Carter moves the frame of representation around - references to nineteenth-century poetry, the music halls of 1930s Paris, 'official' historical accounts - and in so doing points to the language and act of representation itself, she also animates the fixed image within that frame. Jeanne's identity is constructed through a textual mosaic of cultural references and temporal planes, and this projects Jeanne as a mobile subject whose identity shifts according to context. Indeed, an emphasis on identity as performance and hence, attention to surfaces, widely discussed as it pertains to gendered identity, is here additionally related to race. Butler's assertion that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*"[65] is applicable to the

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[64] Tiffin, Helen, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse", p.21.

[65] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), p.140.

black female body along two axes as the cultural codes of racial identity are likewise bound up with performative practice.

Each woman literally performs for the male character, dancing erotically, but this also seems true in terms of their identity: Leilah, it transpires, has been acting the part of *femme fatale* and later materialises in the guise of militant heroine, and the discrepancy between Jeanne as muse and Madame Duval as toothless inebriate opens up the range of identities which these characters may assume. Jeanne's comparison to the American singer, Josephine Baker, is perhaps the most telling in this regard, and this allusion alone informs Carter's text in several ways. Famous for her "Danse Sauvage" in a costume of feathers, Baker dramatised the category of "primitive"; she challenged audiences' expectations of coherent subjectivity ("is it man/woman? black/white?"[66]); she was absorbed into French colonialist fantasies (in 1931 she was chosen to be Queen of the Colonial Exposition until the organisers remembered that she did not come from a French colony); and as an eroticised black woman Baker came to embody many of the characteristics enumerated by Gilman (even her biographer transcribes her as such: "She was Venus in a black body with an irresistible smile."[67]). Finally, Baker's associations with transvestism, her use of blackface - a black woman impersonating a black woman[68] - in turn mark Jeanne's behaviour as performative.

Her apparent participation in Baudelaire's fantasy - her performance is dictated by his codes of desire - is countered by a sense of control, and this control is evidenced by her reported thoughts. This is the realm of resistance which Carter imagines for the historical Jeanne Duval: "I do like to think of her sitting there thinking...I mean, she could have had limited revenges."[69] Carter identifies these means of "revenge" in Jeanne's use of language and her command of disease which is itself a form of communication in its properties

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[66] Rose, Phyllis, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), p.19.

[67] Rose, Phyllis, p.262.

[68] See Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp.279-80.

[69] Interview with Anne Smith, p.29.

of transmission.

The black body "speaks" in its metaphorical capacity, but the characters' speech itself disrupts the prevalent system of signification. The role of speech is significant in considering how far the black figure evades stereotypical constructions. In a reversal of Said's point that the coloniser speaks *for* the courtesan, Jeanne's own desires are inserted into a narrative which on the surface would seem to efface them. The 'heroine' of a feminist re-vision of a Eurocentric story about a famous poet, Jeanne is given a *voice*. Earlier references to "argot" and "patois" are contradicted when this voice speaks directly, as it has a distinctly English accent which immediately shifts the reader's perception of the protagonist. The impression of her as a sultry foreigner belonging to a land of "lilting palm-trees" is shattered by her use of the words "bloody" and "crap", introducing a language often characterised as working-class. (pp.10-11) It is worth noting too that the first word she utters in the story is a resounding "*No*!", while the second exclamation is indicative of the collusion between the narrative voice and Jeanne's point of view, as she repeats aloud the narration's silent accusation of "sucker!". (p.12) In such a moment of narrative control, through a pronouncement of the implicit, this is where her agency resides. While Jameson may relegate to a "post-structuralist slogan" the significance of the colonised subject's newly-acquired voice as a strategy of limited power,[70] within the field of literary representation its considerable impact cannot be so easily dismissed. In fact, this incident creates the impression that Baudelaire remains excluded from an unspoken world of language (available to the reader), and this wrested command of the narrative is cleverly ironic since it undermines the authority of his poetic imagery, the very imagery which Carter uses as the building blocks of her story.

The sense of irony effected in this strategy is given a further twist. Like Margaret in *The Magic Toyshop*, Jeanne's role seems to problematise the fixed relation of writing and speech: she rolls her cheroots out of sheets of discarded verse. In a defiant gesture of reverse alchemy, she reduces the metaphysical

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[70] Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s", p.184.

to its material constituency and thereby literally consumes the images which Baudelaire has made out of her. As Levi-Strauss has shown, the colonial encounter is always caught in relations of language, in contrasts between the literary and a "clatter of ungrammatical recriminations" (*BV*, p.18), specifically between distinctions of writing and speech, for, as he contends,

> the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery. The use of writing...as a source of intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, is a secondary result, and more often than not it may even be turned into a means of strengthening, justifying or concealing the other.[71]

The poet's sway over his muse in Carter's story can be read in precisely these terms; in the power of the poet's status, in her obedience and economic dependence, and most importantly in his poetry's "concealing" effects. Carter's narrative is clearly "postcolonial" in its orientation, as it succeeds in disrupting these relations through images as humorous and simple as the combustion of a poem.

The presentation of Leilah in terms of language, however, is not so straightforward. Her language is similarly first characterised by its implications of race and class - her "argot or patois was infinitely strange" (*PNE*, p.26) - and by its contrast to the logic of "subject, verb, object and extension" of Evelyn's own language. Lacking this order, her speech is heard by him as the sounds of a "demented bird". (p.19) The stream of verbal abuse directed at Evelyn seems continuous with Leilah's defecation and vomiting which disgust him. Bakhtin, in fact, draws a parallel between the grotesque concept of the body and colloquial forms of language, aligning physical and verbal excretions: "the grotesque was the basis of all the abuses, uncrownings, teasing, and impertinent gestures".[72] In terms of language, then, Bakhtin proves useful for sketching their disruption of formal language and Old World logic. Yet, at the end of *The Passion of New Eve*, Leilah's speech has the authority of a brigade commander and "the cut-glass vowels of an East Coast

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[71] Levi-Strauss, Claude, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973 [1955]), p.299. In "A Writing Lesson", Levi-Strauss recounts the act of mimicry by the Nambikwara chief who quickly grasped the authority invested in writing and so drew lines on paper in a pretense of communication.

[72] Bakhtin, p.341.

university". (p.175) Like Baudelaire, Evelyn has been unaware of the Other's act of mimicry. Alternatively of course, Leilah's reappearance as a militant feminist may not indicate that Evelyn has originally misread her, but rather that a cultural 'reclamation' of the black figure can only take place through class mobility. Certainly her reincarnation as a militant figure preserves the element of threat initially associated with the female black body, and, moreover, to read either of Leilah's personas as an 'original' would be to read against the novel's own theme of performance. The representation of this body of difference in *The Passion of New Eve* finally remains ambiguous, since the female black figure eludes definitive categories as it alludes to the possibility of a mobile subjectivity. Employing "fictional forms inherited from the colonial period to create a critique of that period's consequences",[73] Carter shuffles the frames of colonial and postcolonial configurations, thereby drawing attention to the currency of classical representations of the black female figure in European culture.

## III. In the Imaginary Museum

The reference to Botticelli in the title of Carter's "Black Venus" and in the imaginary description of Jeanne - "[a] scallop-shell carried her stark naked across the Atlantic" (p.18) - is shared by the opening of Emma Tennant's *Black Marina* published in the same year as Carter's short story. With this novel, the focus shifts from a postcolonial reading that shows the gothic located in the black body as grotesque and abject, to a gothic narrative situated in a 'post' colonial (in fact neo-colonial) setting. Tennant's novel begins with the arrival of a mysterious girl on the shores of St James in the West Indies. The character/narrator, Holly, watches her approach: "Her head came in like a blot on the water - like a drowned spider". (*BM*, p.13) The portent of her unexpected appearance on the island is conveyed in Holly's anticipation of her gradual emergence from the sea:

> There was no one between me and the scuffed sand, and those ugly pink shells...and the blue sea nibbled by dead palm fronds -

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[73] Carter, "Notes From The Frontline", Wandor (ed), *On Gender and Writing* (London: Pandora, 1983), pp.69-77 (p.76).

> and the girl who had pushed off from the side of the platform now and was swimming in as if she'd been given my address the other side of the world and was making straight for me.(p.16)

The scene is suggestive of the black "Venus" since her swim ashore completes a trip across the Atlantic, she is associated with the imagery of "pink shells" and "blue sea", and the whole scene is presented self-consciously as a textual composition, "like a flat, badly painted canvas in this heat that distorts everything as you look at it". (p.16) In fact this last image reflects the combination in Tennant's own narrative of the shabbiness of the "ugly" shells and the "dead" palms, which "distort" or deflate any straightforward allusion to the text of high art, *and* the possible mythic and classical connotations of black Marina. Indeed Marina's own delight in the account of her name, which tells the story of a daughter crossing the seas in search of her father, is met with Holly's sarcastic remark, "[h]ow very poetic".[74]

So a dialectical relation between the lyrical and the mundane featured in Carter strikes a chord here, and Tennant's novel also shares some of the issues raised in *The Passion of New Eve* and "Black Venus" regarding the representation of the black female body. Yet significant differences include the fact that for the most part *Black Marina* is actually set in the West Indies, placing the conflict between a colonial past and a postcolonial present/future within the geographical 'New World' itself and drawing in the economics of a neocolonialism. Furthermore the novel recalls specific images from gothic precedents, which, as we shall see, evince a postmodern reading of the genre.

No "lazy island where the jewelled parrot rocks on the enamel tree" (*BV*, p.10), the island of St James is instead made of rotting vegetation and marked by the violent scarring of deforestation initiated by the island's new owners. The wild flowers seem to close in on passers-by, "gaping and pushing" at them. (*BM*, p.140) Severed limbs are imagined sticking out of the sand, although these are in fact the parts of an urn washed ashore. A sense of violence within the landscape is created through metaphors of water and blood; nights in this tropical climate "are as warm as swimming in your own blood" (p.39), while

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[74] *BM*, p.113. The story echoes the plot of *Pericles*. Marina, "born in a tempest", (IV.i.18) searches for her father, Pericles: "if you did know my parentage/ You would not do me violence." (V.i.99-100)

the image of "the red blood spreading in the sea" (p.43) is repeated at intervals throughout the novel. Even the sun's glare on the island gives the impression of "blood light all over".[75] Perhaps the most horrific image of the island's nature is the manchineel tree, which leaks "a poison sap, and rain coming through the leaves can burn you bad" (p.34), and when this happens during the remembered picnic the children run screaming with pain and fear. Even the names of the island's geographical features such as the "Man o' War Beach" (p.73) incorporate a threat which is both natural and political. Indeed, the political threat is figured as a natural disaster when Holly envisages "the day coming when the violence would erupt and we'd all be frozen, for ever, in boiling stone" (p.96), an image suggested by Sanjay's statue of the Pompeian lovers.

The indefinite sense of anxiety in the novel accumulates through different experiences of time, a postmodernist scheme similar to that found in "Black Venus". The natural world's collapse into degeneration, the potential for violence, and the feeling of loneliness created by the tropics are conflated in Holly's mind with the inevitable conclusion of a specific moment in her own culture, in her reflection on the late sixties in Britain as a period when "everything was rotting with sadness". (p.33) Tennant creates an atmosphere of insecurity and danger by fixing her story at a precarious point in history, when the factual American invasion of Grenada in 1983 has just occurred, a possible insurrection by the (fictional) "Black Power" movement is rumoured, and the ebbing of colonial power means a future of uncertainty - "an island that might be blown up any minute". (p.38)

Threaded amongst these twentieth-century political contests are distinct literary tropes of the gothic. The figure of a mad girl dressed in white and the secret of incest, both features of *Black Marina*, are immediately recognisable as gothic devices and can be traced back through a tradition of gothic writing. Dickens' Miss Havisham and Collins' *Woman in White* provide classic examples of nineteenth-century representations of "female whiteness", signifying purity,

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[75] *BM*, p.29. This phrase carries echoes of Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech (April, 1968), regarding immigrants into Britain from the former colonies, particularly the West Indies.

madness, and death,[76] and, as in the case of the first Mrs Rochester, this figure was frequently the focus of the theme of female sexuality and its social control. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is directly relevant here, as is Jean Rhys' revision of the story in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, for their use of the gothic engages with colonial discourse, the latter being one of several "postcolonial transformations of Gothic".[77] In Tennant, Sanjay's daughter Pandora is mad (a consequence, it is hinted, of witnessing her father and Millie together, while the gossips say she inherited it from her mother) and her description as "a tragic thing" is the epitome of the nineteenth-century gothic figure:

> now she's all in white, in a long dress like a portrait of a Victorian girl; she's making a sound like a laughing gull, swooping in white over the sand behind Sanjay. (p.40)

Pandora's madness is expressed in a perverse relationship with nature as she is spied "naked and trying to fuck a palm tree" (p.130), an abuse which says as much about the landscape under a colonial regime as it does about the girl's desires exceeding any control. Her name indicates a key role in the plot - that to disclose her character's history is to release the novel's secret of transgression.

Tennant's inclusion of this figure, however, seems to point to a kind of textual nostalgia, a symptom, Jameson proposes, of the postmodernist unease with the past which leads us "to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past".[78] Like popular film, contemporary fiction reveals a desire "to return to that older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artifacts through once again",[79] a desire which can surface in the shape of an image like the woman in white. Consequently, it is possible to

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[76] See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* (London: Virago, 1987) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp.613-22.

[77] Newman, Judie, "Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and the Sobraj Case", *Modern Fiction Studies* 40 (Spring, 1994), pp.85-100 (p.85). Newman's use of the term remains confined to discussions of literature written by people from previously colonised countries; my use of this term refers to a chronological period and to the consequences of the end of empire for those born in its former centre.

[78] Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in Foster, Hal (ed), *Postmodern Culture* (London & Sydney: Pluto Press, 1985 [1983]), pp.111-25 (p.118).

[79] Jameson in Foster, p.116.

read the figure of Pandora as an example of Jameson's notion of "pastiche" in that it does not bear the moral intentions of parody, and has been bleached of most of its meaning, leaving a textual sign of intense materiality behind, as "the signifier in isolation becomes ever more material...ever more vivid in sensory ways."[80] The "Victorian girl" suggests a nostalgia for the colonialist and gothic aesthetics of romance that lacks any meaningful engagement with them. Such an image may be read as an acutely material signifier adrift from an assured referent, and verging on an "absolute self-referentiality".[81] In this sense the postmodern character of Tennant's novel is ostensibly a-political, as the context of sixties' culture itself becomes a nostalgic text.

While this may be characteristic of the "logic of late capitalism", the borrowing from earlier genre plots is noticeably both "allusive and elusive" in relation to its precursors. In their frequent allusions to the gothic through reference to its constructions and familiar tropes, the use of postmodernist fragments of the genre by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon is frequently guilty of just this charge - that these references manage to *elude* direct comment on the generic tradition (or useful meaning) and appear as fictional decorations. Indeed, Holly imagines the entire cast of characters in the island's drama to be "people like cut-outs you shoot down at a fair" (p.145), a series of types who are one-dimensional but have still become "our own pop images" from a history of cultural representation. In fact, Tennant's novel emphasises the textuality of a figure like Pandora, since the appearance of pastiche involves "the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language",[82] thus underlining the performative aspects of 'writing' genre and the sometimes depleted manifestation of the gothic in particular. Even as the sign of the girl in white seems to have broken loose from its 'referent' in the socio-historical (or literary) world, it is only an incomplete separation, for the sign in postmodernism develops the necessity of

keeping a phantom of reference alive, as the ghostly reminder of

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[80] Jameson in Foster, p.120.

[81] Jameson, Fredric, "Periodizing the 60s" (1984) in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1988), pp.178-208 (p.197).

[82] Jameson, p.114.

> its own outside or exterior, since this allows it closure, self-definition, and an essential boundary line.[83]

A series of spectral links run through this sign, the sediments of gothic genre in particular, yet it bears a quality of self-containment in relation to the surrounding text. The figure of Pandora may be seen then as a classic example of the postmodernist fragment of the gothic, collected in the text's "imaginary museum" of generic "masks" and "styles".[84] Such a jumble of fragments is in fact presented as grotesque in the novel. The "decrepit museum of Sanjay's taste" with its exhibits of "a merman's tail, a thunderstruck hair, an embalmed piglet" is further used to characterise Pandora, since the text makes a comparison between Sanjay's collection and Pandora's mind. His strange objects "matched the bizarre assortment of images in her head", thereby figuring Pandora's 'box' as a version of the postmodern "museum". (*BM*, p.122)

Gothic themes of rape, incest, and racial transgression are focused on the 'Daddy' figure in Tennant's novel, who centres the second trope familiar to the gothic. Sanjay too seems to belong to another era, and his life reads like a miniature gothic plot in itself: living in a "falling-down house alone, wife dead, daughter mad." (p.41) Inbreeding amongst the few remaining colonisers, the pervasive feeling that one cannot leave the island (Holly constantly repeats that she "didn't get away" (p.130)), and the fact that living there "is like lying down in your own grave" (p.73) contribute to a sense of the island's centripetal pull culminating in the act of rape and incest. In this somewhat uneven novel Tennant mixes together banal accounts of Maldwin Carr's political background with surprising images such as the imagined smells of cigars and "warm cunt", these sexual references standing as the novel's most potent signs, "the seeds of everything that went wrong later", as Holly predicts. (p.23)

The representation of the patriarchal "Daddy" in "Black Venus" - the "mad scientist/shaman/toymaker/male-authority figure" which Carter repeatedly draws[85] - invites a comparison to Plath's "Daddy" of *Ariel* in that

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[83] Jameson, Fredric, "Periodizing the 60s", p.197.

[84] Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.18.

[85] Haffenden, John, *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.88.

the male figure is both a father and a lover, and the images of a besieged female body in opposition to this figure are experienced as gothic. The colonial relation itself is often expressed in terms of parent/child and lover/beloved. Malin is right to distinguish love in the gothic as "disfiguring love"[86] since it often carries implications of taboo and transgression. Jeanne's relationship in "Black Venus" is one example, where an incestuous bond is suggested in Baudelaire's identification with the empire which "had fathered her". (*BV*, p.17) In *Black Marina*, the birth of the "honey-skinned girl" (*BM*, p.117) who emerges from the sea is, like Jeanne, the result of sexual and racial transgression between coloniser and colonised. The gothic heart of Tennant's story lies in the subsequent incestuous encounter between father and daughter, one of the narrative's secrets contracted into the equation, "Fear - and father." (p.154)

Furthermore, the relationship between Sanjay and his wife also leads to a kind of corruption, as the gender politics of gothic confinement are addressed in this novel too, where it is not simply the island's allegedly claustrophobic effects on its inhabitants that accounts for his wife Dora's demise, but rather the demands of marriage: "Why should a man think he can shut a woman up on a lump of earth in the middle of the sea and just expect her to live her life out with him?" (p.74) The duration of her life on the island corresponds to Dora's role as Sanjay's wife so that her rumoured madness and fatal illness may be the result of marital confinement as much as heredity, the natural surroundings, or mosquito bites.

Associated with racial difference, the mosquitoes have been brought to the islands, it is rumoured, as an act of political sabotage by the Americans and are thought to come originally from Africa, carrying an infection to which the colonials succumb. The fever becomes associated with the image of Africa, just as Leilah and Jeanne embodied a sickness seen as menacing by the white man, and the paradise of the New World of St James is similarly soured by this contact when its trees begin to die. (p.112)

Transmission of disease through blood is a theme contiguous to other gothic aspects of the novel - kinship, violence, and incest. The secret of

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[86] Malin, Irving, *New American Gothic* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p.8.

Marina's parentage plays on Tennant's reference to Larkin's line, "They fuck you up, your mum and dad" (p.108), since, again like Jeanne, she is a "child of the colony", a result of a union between coloniser and colonised and therefore a force of disruption to previously discriminate spheres. A sexual transgression in the past across culturally determined boundaries and the return of its ensuing progeny triggers the sense of destabilization amongst the others on the island, while hints of political instability magnify the pervasive sense of anxiety. Tennant here reads the historical and political consequences of the postcolonial period through the words of a British poet of the Sixties. The novel is in fact filtered through this sensibility - the days of "Hendrix and Joplin" (p.134) - and often creates a clash of the present and the past: contemporary details such as the shirts from "Turnbull and Asser" worn by the "white man of Empire" (p.60), Maldwin Carr, (and also by Simon Mangrove in *The Crack* (p.7) and Carter's Marquis in "The Bloody Chamber" (p.38)) are contrasted to an invocation of the past, frequently through references to a textual history of the gothic. *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, provides another means of experiencing the past and the present intertextually. Itself the subject of numerous postcolonial revisionist novels and an articulation of the explorer spirit, it is used as a metaphor for Holly's impressions of isolation.[87]

The gothic is also evident in Tennant's emphasis on surfaces, whereby "[b]odies are screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements" of cultural meanings.[88] Like Carter's treatment of the black female body, *Black Marina* uses colour as a vocabulary of signs. An early indication of this pattern in the novel can be found in the strange image of the "albino Negro" (p.34) who displays both races in the one body. With "a white frizz of hair" (p.34), Barnby appears to be "a freak of nature" whose "eyes were small and red and fringed with wheat-coloured lashes". (p.123) This vocabulary of colour principally articulates the impact of Marina's ambiguous identity of mixed

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[87] The South African writer J. M. Coetzee's novel *Foe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987 [1986]); a chapter in Levi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* is named after Stevenson's novel. Holly "began to feel like Robinson Crusoe", *BM*, p.50.

[88] Stone, Sandy, The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" in Epstein, Julia and Kristina Straub (eds), *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), p.294.

race, since the play of light and dark across her face is *read* by another character, Maldwin, who has been sent to study the political situation. The swift changes in her face are interpreted as signs of that national turbulence. More significantly, the alternating colours express a series of stereotypical values prevalent in discourses of racial alterity, so that her body stands as an allegorical marker much like Leilah's and Jeanne's. Marina's face, then, acts as a screen onto which a series of meanings are projected. An interest in film, shared by Carter and Weldon too, is evident in the colour scheme employed by Tennant in these scenes.[89] Marina appears to Maldwin "as remote as an actress in an ancient film: flickering, silent, an image in chiaroscuro" (p.102), and later he thinks her body is "like a shutter in a camera or like a rapid succession of shots". (p.148)

The cinematic analogy in which black and white are interdependent in their meaning is more relevant to Marina's dual identity as a "half-caste child" (p.47) than it is in relation to Carter's protagonists. It is telling that although Jeanne is "Creole" and Leilah is "some in-between thing" (*PNE*, p.21) both are understood to be black since cultural codes judge the union of black and white to result in a wholly black identity in which whiteness has been effaced. The nature of Marina's identity, meanwhile, permits an interpretation of her disconcerting role in terms of "the ambiguous, the in-between, the composite" of Kristeva's abject, and allows for the variable interpretations of the same figure, the latter being indicated in the first of the filmic images, the "zebra-stripe shadows over her face". (p.102) Both racial identities are then alternately projected across her body. One moment she appears to be white: "In the moonlight she was white" (p.101), "he [Maldwin] saw Sanjay look out at the moon and in again at the other face of whiteness" (p.144), "a white face, moon-shaped, impassive" (p.148); and in another moment she appears to be black: "that spider-girl" (p.67), "a honey-skinned girl who gets so black with silent rage she vanishes into the darkness". (p.117) Where Jeanne and Leilah were figured as shadows, Marina repeats the equation of blackness with

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[89] Tennant notably dedicates *Queen of Stones* to Laura Mulvey, a critic best known for her work on cinema, the gaze, and gender politics; author of the seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

absence. The subsequent play along the spectrum of black and white in the text carries two principal themes: the identity of the black woman as 'primitive' and the eruption of violence.

The illicit voodoo world of Leilah's abortionist in *The Passion of New Eve* finds a counterpart in Tennant in the mysterious "obeah woman" (p.98), Tanty Grace, and the power of the white cock feathers, which, in Holly's dream, kill Dora through their poisoned tips because they "had clawed into her as she danced". (p.147) The indigenous culture is abridged to these few vague (and clichéd) signs of the ominous. In a description of Pandora's playground - "slime filled the toy marina" (p.131) - it is possible that Tennant's pun on the black girl's name intimates a potential connection to the abject; certainly Pandora's fascination with the toy boats in the base "slime" and the revelation that Marina is her black sister means the proximity here of white and black is factored into the scene's configuration, fixing the white girl in the position of player and blackness as the primal matter with which she plays. Allusions to the primitive in relation to the black woman also echo Carter's language; like the "ghetto nymph" and the whore who was "the Empress of all the Africas" (*BV*, p.17), the character of Marina seems to embrace the identity of both aborigine and queen: "her face was black, features heavy in her face, mouth full in a *savage* contempt. Her plaited hair was like reeds in a tribal crown."[90] Maldwin's interpretation of the girl as a kind of 'noble savage' contains her in the language of colonisation whereby a possible response of fear to her 'savage' aspect is dispersed in the reference to a projected nobility. In contrast to Marina's queenly resemblance which convinces Maldwin that he cannot prevent her outwitting him, Tennant employs the shadow image we saw in Carter: "she'll steal away like a shadow, leaving just a white husk behind". (p.126) Repeating the ephemeral shadow metaphor which in turn deprives the black body of substance, here the ghostly "husk" leaves the impression that her white identity is as temporal as her black one. Indeed, read as a larval image, the emergent being is imbued with self-identity, and, leaving the trace of its birth behind, then "steals" its self-presence away,

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[90] p.102, emphasis added.

evading Maldwin's surveillance *and* the vestiges of colonial language. Alternatively, this metaphor undermines the colonialist equation of whiteness with a transcendent subjectivity, since Marina 'sheds' the white casing as a bodily, abject skin. Yet, considered in the light of Butler's theory of performative identity, it is equally possible to decipher these images of shadows and husks as the very *location* of identity (albeit of stereotypical forms), whereby Tennant's character attempts to renegotiate the possibilities available to her.

The mobility of identification suggested by the "husk" image is reminiscent of the scene in *The Passion of New Eve* in which Leilah assumes the identity of "Lily-in-the-mirror" before her nightly sojourns. The surface signification of the body again evokes Butler's argument and its implications for racial identity in Tennant's depiction of Marina's mask of gothic colours: "Strangest thing: Mari's face white as a mime. Eyes circled in black. Mouth so red it looked like a flamboyant."[91] An impression of the exotic Other is still current in this description, but the reference to mime and the inverse of "blackface" make-up emphasise the degree of performance constituent in Marina's identity. Her strangeness is a multi-layered effect of deliberate disguise, indeterminate race, and embodiment of the past's secrets.

Beyond the play of light and dark across Marina's face, there are two incidents in which the shift from white to black coincides with physical violence, an expression of a cultural perception of racial and sexual transgression and their effects. Both declaim a swift climax to the narrative and hinge on mistaken identity. The first of these is the sight which confronts Holly on her way to prevent political insurrection:

> Sanjay held her down. Her face was smothered in white but the stuff was smudging off on one side. She was struggling sometimes, then sometimes she was still, like a winged bird. (p.151)

The disturbance to Marina's identity caused by this act of incest is symbolised by the erasure of colour from her face. The fact that this shift is imposed on her, together with her signs of struggle, belies Holly's resistance to "say if it is

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[91] *BM*, p.140. A "flamboyant" is a huge, red flower which grows in the tropics.

rape", although this "if" does briefly introduce the question of complicity in relation to "Daddy" - an issue seen to be persistent in Carter's texts. Particularly troubling is the inferred parallel between the violent sexual act and a partial loss of white identity, as if incestuous relations disclose and demand the acknowledgement of her "true" origins as black or mixed race. Marina's comparison to a winged bird curiously inverts the gendered roles of the Leda-and-the-swan myth (including the guise of a bird) which compounds the sense of illicit transgression while intimating the powerlessness of her position. In fact, this incident has left her as dead, since she looks to Holly "like a kind of zombie", "cold and clammy" and "ghostly white". (p.153) An early warning of incest had been transmitted through Sanjay's tone of voice when Holly finds "something disgusting" (p.35) in the same voice being used to make a pass at a woman and then immediately to address a child, as if language were a source of moral contagion.

This drama of multiple taboos is closely followed by Sanjay's murder. Covered in mud from the swamp where he raped his daughter, he is mistaken for a black man, assumed to be involved with the revolution, and immediately shot by the Marines. The irony of Sanjay's fate is double-edged, since he is killed because he has been literally and morally "blackened" by the incident with Marina - here "black" is employed as a sign for "sinful" or "immoral" - while the humorous ending to his life may also be read in relation to the comedy of 'blackface' convention. The fate of the father in this gothic story of family secrets, madness, and death, has the appearance of a feminist joke, a kind of meta-romance, yet the account of Marina's withdrawn behaviour after the rape marvels at the peculiarity of the sisters' physical mirroring of one another in different colours - she and Pandora "like two halves of a splintered mind coming together", (p.154) each with a corresponding birthmark, a sombre observation beyond parody.

The close proximity of violent death and sexual taboo also appears in an acute form of surface inscription. Violence marks the black female body in Carter and Tennant in ways which focus an uneasy relation between erotic desire and gothic incarceration. This becomes evident in the following two descriptions of the black figure:

> she rolled the mesh stocking down one black, matte thigh, upon which the coarse mesh had left indentations as tragic as if the flesh had been pressed against barbed wire in an attempt at an escape from a prison camp in which she had always lived, would always attempt to flee, would always fail. (*PNE*,p.24)

> Her eyes floated like waterlilies in a pool fenced with barbed wire. (*BM*,p.144)

Both Leilah and Marina are figures of desire in their respective narratives, yet in each case their skin is marked with the signs of imprisonment. The inference that they are literally locked into the racialised body of the prisoner or slave is supported in these novels, where blackness is generally associated with slavery. Doubly disempowered as the racial other in Western society and as the prisoner (and therefore criminal), the black body is then fetishised as the absolutely passive, and "tragically" beautiful, figure of sexual desire.

The above descriptions of the black female body place it in a deliberately ambiguous position, poised between acts of reproduction and revision. The gothic worlds of mystery and taboo in which the figure appears often reproduce aspects of the colonial constructions which they seem to want to undermine. Some textual balance is provided by contemporary references to "Black Power" and Martin Luther King, showing a consciousness of racial equality issues. Moreover, when the cause of oppression in the novel is explicitly named as "patriarchal imperialism" (p.22), this points to both the family empire of the *father* and the political empire of colonial Britain, and, most importantly, indicates a perceived connection between representational configurations of colonial discourse and the gothic genre. This dual effect - of reproduction and revision - ultimately accentuates the act of representation itself, and, even as we may read the body as literally incarcerated by a history of enslavement, following Sedgwick's emphasis on "the quasi-linguistic inscription of surfaces"[92], Leilah's skin becomes a textual surface marked with traces which impart their own distinct narrative. Through the work of metonymy these criss-cross "indentations" unite the ideas of pleasure and torture; her application of the gothic means that Carter additionally draws an

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[92] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel", *PMLA* 96 (March 1981), pp.255-70 (p.256).

ideological parallel between these two realms of experience in their representational confinement of the female figure. The prison camp from which Leilah "would always attempt to flee" is, in fact, the "prisonhouse of language" itself.[93] Here then, Tennant and particularly Carter are engaged in a textual project that invites comparison to Plath, "for whom the limits of the body and the limits of symbolisation are constantly worked over or put at risk."[94]

Finally, it is a feminist interest in the cultural constructions which confine women and contribute to the formation of their identity, which has drawn these writers to the gothic and hence to patterns of colonialism. Loomba argues that it is "[p]atriarchy as a *motor* of colonialism, rather than just an additional factor within it" which now concerns feminist critics in their evaluation of colonialist texts.[95] While the figure of the strangled woman speaks to the notion of marriage as gothic confinement, the treatment of the confined black female body and the conventions of representation which circumscribe this figure also question the structure of heterosexual relations and the family, but in this case through a combination of gothic narrative and postcolonial critique where the two coincide in their explorations of patriarchal constructions on which the colonialist project itself is dependent. Meanwhile, it is important to bear in mind, as Loomba does, that the "color-coded patriarchies" of colonial structures are not universals in themselves.[96] Contemporary fiction engages with a cultural politics of identity and difference which embraces the representation of race and ethnicity as well as gender and sexuality, and employs inventive and traditional imagery of the gothic as a means of expression.

The two strands which contribute to Carter and Tennant's treatment of

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[93] After Jameson, *The Prison-house of Language* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972).

[94] Rose, Jacqueline, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1992), p.37. In locating these concerns in her poetry, Rose characterises Plath as "a writer of abjection".

[95] Loomba, Ania, "The Color of Patriarchy: Critical difference, cultural difference, and Renaissance drama" in Hendricks, Margo and Patricia Parker (eds), *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.17-34 (p.27).

[96] Loomba in Hendricks, p.33.

the trope of alterity inform one another - reading the black woman as gothic body (corrupt, grotesque, dangerous) is a practice of colonial discourse, while reading the gothic through a postcolonial critique reveals in turn the cultural and historical bases for the mechanisms of some of the older gothic literature. At a period in history when the colonial enterprise is unmasked as a drive for cultural annihilation and homogeneity, the story of decline and failure is a familiar one. Recognising this fateful pattern, Holly's narrative reviews the world of *Black Marina*, on the brink of postcolonial transition, as "that riddle where the answer is always ruin, incest, death" (p.150) - an apt description of the gothic novel itself.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## 'A SACRED HORROR': THE POSTHUMAN BODY

> The woman is perfected.
> Her dead
> Body wears the smile of accomplishment
> - "Edge", ll.1-3

While the last chapter considered ways in which the gothic participates in expressions of cultural otherness in terms of gender and race, manifestations of the gothic in novels by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon can also be found in instances of the grotesque effected by twentieth-century technological innovation or in figures which direct attention to their simulated condition. The simulation of the body (as living or dead) created by such innovation suggests the term 'posthuman', as the simulated, 'plastic' body replaces and represents the 'authentic' body.[1] Sharing the depiction of a *devised*, manufactured female body, several novels once again point to the encoded nature of the postmodern figure. Particularly striking in the work of these writers are three simulated figures which may be read within this rubric: the surgically-altered body, the waxwork figure as dead or mutilated body, and, in a shift of emphasis from materiality to a spectral presence, the cinematic body. The latter forms a kind of logical conclusion to the discussion in this thesis of body as metaphor, whereby an impression of the body's substantial presence all but disappears in a world of image, simulation, and representation. In the case of both the chokered figure and the black female figure, the interdependence and constant negotiation between the metaphoric

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[1] Another 'posterity', the term 'posthuman' rests on the prefix 'post' in the sense of 'beyond', thus incorporating both the substitution of the human as if it were dispensable or even a mere stage in history, and 'beyond' life in the literal sense of death. An emphasis on simulation, meanwhile, is a symptom, Jameson might point out, of the postmodern obsession with representation *as* reality. Jameson argues that "'Representation' is both some vague bourgeois conception of reality and also a specific sign system". See *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1993 [1991]), p.123.

and the literal meanings belonging to the female subject are foregrounded. In the posthuman figure this tension is even more apparent, as invisibility and transcendence are paradoxically featured in the visible and the immanent.

The posthuman body is a third figure which Carter, Tennant, and Weldon use both to gesture towards an intimate relation between the gothic and the act of representation, and to participate in the nexus of gothic characteristics we have already noted in contemporary writing including colour codes, sexual violence, and intertextual references to fairytale and the traditional gothic. As in the case of the other two figures discussed, the posthuman body is informed by connotations of the gothic while at the same time acting as a vehicle for broader cultural concerns, such as the perceptions of a 'correct' female body. Forms of the living dead - the posthuman - summarily express the danger inherent in unstable boundaries of identity and, as we will see in the case of the cinematic body, may in fact reflect more broadly on poststructuralist perceptions of representation itself.

Figures of the posthuman are presented as 'freaks' - a comparison which looks back to Moers' assessment of the 'female' gothic. Moers argues that for Plath the source of gothic terror is "not the monster, the goblin, or the freak, but the living corpse".[2] Although Moers' distinction is useful in discerning experiences of the gothic, it overlooks the ways in which the figure of the "living corpse", in both Plath's poetry and Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's fiction, *is* imbricated with the freakish. We noted in Chapter 2 a number of critics of the 'Female Gothic' who identify the freakish as a prominent motif in post-60s women's writing. The qualification to Moers' statement is significant in approaching the contemporary gothic since the fiction in which it appears is filtered through a 1960s sensibility. The word "freak" frequently appears in the novels of all three writers, with reference to transvestism, gigantism, anthropozoism and other 'unnatural' states.

Before discussing the three versions of the posthuman body specified above, the term "freak" warrants closer attention, as does the significance of its cultural context for the novels in which these bodies appear. For just as

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[2] Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women*, p.110.

contemporary gothic is clearly a post-Freudian phenomenon in its absorption of twentieth-century ideas, so too is it invested with popularised notions of the 'freak'. The term itself became synonymous with defiant subculture in the 1960s while still retaining echoes of the circus fairground.[3] It is the latter which animates the word's appearance in contemporary British writing still, making Arbus' perpetuation of an earlier American iconography as relevant for women's writing today as it was when Moers invoked her photographs as apt 'illustrations' for American gothic writing of the 1930s.[4] The characterisations of social 'misfits' and 'grotesques' generally distinguish the southern American gothic by Faulkner, McCullers and others.[5] In describing the milieu in which Arbus photographed (one which conjures up Carter's choice of location in *The Passion of New Eve*), Susan Sontag has written: "New York, with its drag balls and welfare hotels, was rich with freaks".[6] This remark conveys more than a sense of place; it captures a certain *zeitgeist*, one which also seems to have caught the imagination of the generation of writers under consideration, each of whom published their first novel in the 1960s.[7] Sontag's account of what makes New York "rich with freaks" has several implications for reading the gothic in Carter, Tennant, and Weldon. Although Arbus' photographs suggest that her freaks' exoticism transcends historical specificity, in fact they often featured the sexually ambiguous and the economically disadvantaged. In their

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[3] In the late nineteenth century the word was used to refer to "a living curiosity exhibited in a show" (esp. U.S.); in the 1960s and 1970s it became associated with hippie culture. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989; 2nd ed).

[4] Arbus' subjects seem noticably Carteresque: amongst others Mae West, a tattooed man named "Jack Dracula", wax models, and a midget impersonating Marilyn Monroe.

[5] In addition to noting the nostalgia for a past gentility in southern gothic, Ladell Payne has written about the "search for identity, the lyrical voice, the romantic agrarian vision, the Gothicism and grotesquerie" which make up the southern fictional canon. *Black Novelists and the Southern Literary Tradition* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), p.52. Ihab Hassan has described McCullers' "gothic penchant" as "her interest in the grotesque, the freakish, and the incongruous". See *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p.207. McCullers herself used the term "freakish" to characterise Isak Dinesen's *Seven Gothic Tales*. See *The Mortgaged Heart* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.273.

[6] Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.34. According to Sontag, "anyone Arbus photographed was a freak". (p.35)

[7] Carter, *Shadow Dance* (1965); Tennant, *The Colour of Rain* (1963); Weldon, *The Fat Woman's Joke* (1967). Other novels focus on the period as their subject matter: Carter's *Love* (1971), for example, charts the end of the Sixties.

novels, Carter and Weldon reveal these same conditions as the material sources of the identity of 'freak'. As we will see, the protagonists of *The Passion of New Eve* and *She-Devil* who resemble the freakish each cross boundaries within these categories by means of surgical alteration.

The freakish is often related in the novels to the liminal worlds of the circus and the wax museum,[8] which further colours its invocation as part of contemporary gothic's character. As a contracted world of the abnormal, an arena inhabited by exaggeration, the circus circumscribes a potentially gothic location and a space of hermeneutic hesitancy.[9] In Tennant's *Faustine*, the character of Lisa Crane is portrayed as freakish through a comparison to Catherine the Great who "preferred the company of deaf-mutes, dwarves and circus freaks" (p.57); while Tristessa's fictive autobiography in *The Passion of New Eve* tells of a trapeze artist who performs alongside "dwarfs who wrestled in mud" and a piano-playing horse. (p.152) In these two examples, the circus is mentioned as part of a *story*, and its fascination depends on the deviation between fiction and non-fiction.[10] The circus and the waxwork museum are invoked in these novels to underscore the writers' interests in collapsed distinctions between the natural and the artificial - a crucial dichotomy in discussions of female identity. For, in Carter's words, the freak is defined in terms which clearly evoke the 'posthuman', and echo de Beauvoir: to be a freak is "to be made, not born".[11]

The intervention of artificial factors ensures the genesis of unusual creatures. All three writers relate the freakish to an 'apocalyptic' postmodern

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[8] Arbus' collection includes photographs taken at Madame Tussaud's and at circus fairgounds.

[9] During his discussion of John Banville's novels as exponents of the portmanteau novel, Cornwell gives two examples of what McHale has called "the postmodernist travelling circus motif". He notes that this motif also appears in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *The Incredible Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman*. This circus motif has close affinities with Bakhtin's theory of "carnivalization". Cornwell, p.242, n.13.

[10] Carter chooses the circus as the central focus and location in *Nights at the Circus*, where the central question throughout the novel is whether Fevvers' wings are real or fictive, natural or artificial.

[11] Carter introduction, Walter de la Mare, *Memoirs of a Midget* (Oxford: Oxford Universtiy Press, 1982), xvii. Here Carter also refers to Leslie Fiedler's *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981 [1978]), which offers a comprehensive study of the freakish in literature, film, and culture generally.

age. "Chernobyl has exploded and now all things impossible are possible", Carl May tells his wife in Weldon's *Joanna May*. He thus explains how it is possible to make Joanna "walk with a monkey's head or run on a bitch's legs".[12] In some cases, the unique ontological status of the freak suggests that its post-human appearance nominates it as myth. In *The Passion of New Eve*, for example, Evelyn marvels at Mother's multi-breasted appearance as well as the behaviour of the Beulah women, and concludes that nuclear tests in the desert are responsible: they had "spawned mutations of being - perpetrated hitherto unguessable modes of humanity, in which life parodied myth, or became it." (*PNE*, p.77) Tennant also delineates the freak as a product of the postmodern age. In *Faustine*, Ella's mother reveals to her that overpopulation and "artificial methods" to prevent future conception together "have stopped the natural progression of generations and thrown up hybrids and freaks".[13]

Finally, the context of the museum and the circus constitute a spectral world, in the sense that the act of looking at a *spectacle* is privileged; the 'freak' incorporates this spectrality as an integral part of its definition as sideshow attraction. Such aestheticisation of the grotesque ultimately leads to its commodification.[14] The people of the travelling fair in *Doctor Hoffman*, for example, capitalise on others' desire to look:

> they made their living out of the grotesque. Their bread was deformity...The fairground was a moving toyshop, an ambulant raree-show. (*DrH*, p.99)

The natural revealed as an artificial commodity is a prominent theme in relation to the posthuman figures in novels by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon. The heightened sense of spectrality is additionally linked in their novels to the specifics of gender, since they are concerned with the construction of the male gaze and its female object. Inscribing figures whose corporeal boundaries,

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[12] *Joanna May*, p.143.

[13] *F*, pp.115-16. The relevance of apocalyptic tropes to contemporary gothic writing has been noted by Morrow and McGrath: "The prospect of apocalypse...has redefined the contemporary psyche", *The New Gothic*, xiv.

[14] Guy Debord has argued that the post-modern age has been dominated by the spectacle. See *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). This spectrality is, Debord argues, symptomatic of post-war capitalist society.

determined within categories of gender and race for example, are transgressed, the writers also depict a posthuman body in which its indeterminacy arises out of a perceived ambiguity between nature and artifice, or life and death. The distinct character of late twentieth-century gothic - informed by theoretical debate, the visual arts, and popular culture - is evidenced in the iconography of the posthuman figure.

## I. The Sculpted Body

The physically manipulated and self-determined woman in Fay Weldon's fiction is the culturally 'disciplined' body.[15] Examples of this figure appear in the genetic experimentation in *The Cloning of Joanna May*, the dieting and bingeing Esther of *The Fat Woman's Joke*, as well as the product of extreme surgical alteration, Ruth Pratchet in *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*. Weldon's interest in the technological and social causes of the effects of bodily change, and her deployment of such change as a principal structure in these novels, looks back to the gothic of the late-Victorian period when the device of bodily metamorphosis as narrative design was particularly popular (see Chapter 1). More immediately, it bears direct relevance to contemporary practices of body transformation, particularly cosmetic surgery. Where the modern body is "disciplined", Francis Barker argues, it is "subordinated to a hygienic and surgical science".[16] *She-Devil*'s central figure of the reconstructed woman is subjected to such a process of 'purification' and focuses the novel's interest in cultural definitions of feminine beauty. Carter also features the results of plastic surgery in one of her novels; in *The Passion of New Eve*, the protagonist is transformed from a man to a woman (not from 'ugly' to 'beautiful' as in the case of Ruth). Although these two mutations are very different, we will see that they share a complex relation to history in their

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[15] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991), esp pp.26, 155. Foucault does not consider gender here, but his argument has nevertheless been highly influential in late twentieth-century conceptions of the body.

[16] Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.97. Barker is not referring here to surgery *per se* but to the bourgeois modern inscription of the body as *useful*; the body remains the site of meaning "but in this contained and transcribed form. Almost subject, even, to a transubstantiation."

attempts to forge 'new' identities.

A reading of the female body as gothic in *She-Devil* relies on the protagonist's experience of confinement, the novel's invocation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and a parody of perfection in the cut-up body. Firstly, regarding the experience of confinement, Sedgwick's emphasis on the surfaces of gothic imagery leads us to note that the reader's attention is directed to the surface of the heroine's body from the very beginning: "I was born, I sometimes think, with nerve endings not inside but outside my skin: they shivered and twanged. I grew lumpish and brutish in an attempt to seal them over." (*SD*, p.11) Ruth's wish to "seal" herself arises from a need for self-protection as well as containment. In order to be a 'proper' wife, her imaginary second skin must disguise the "nerve endings", must control the body's evidence of her desire. Ruth's perception of the outside of her body accords with Berger's view that "[t]o be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise".[17] This proves to be the case even when her body has been transformed into the image of Mary, for "the scarring on legs and upper arms [is] still noticeable" (*SD*, p.235) once she looks like her nemesis; the surface marking acts as a reminder that the body of Mary which Ruth has acquired is, in fact, a form of disguise, one which admits her to a position of economic and sexual advantage.

Just as the 'chokered' woman's body bespeaks the carceral conditions of a patriarchally-governed domesticity, the central body in *She-Devil* experiences and tropically reproduces the restraints, both physical and discursive, which Ruth negotiates throughout the plot. Her discomfort and inappropriate size are evident in her domestic circumstances. The reader shares the voyeurism of Ruth's mother-in-law who spies on her from outside the house: "Ruth straightened up, knocking her head against the oak beam over the fireplace. The house had been designed for altogether smaller

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[17] Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.54. Writing about this experience of being observed, Berger claims that 'woman' "comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman." p.46.

occupants."[18] The physical limitations as Ruth perceives them are established at the beginning of the narrative in her description of the sense of enclosure and stasis - "Outside the world turns" (p.7) - which captures the dizzying possibilities denied to her. The dissociation from the 'real' world and consequent feeling of imprisonment are unequivocally blamed on her physical shape: "I am fixed here and now, trapped in my body, pinned to one particular spot". (p.7)

These feelings of self-alienation and entrapment, and a specifically female perception of them, may be read through a phenomenological interpretation of lived bodily experience, alongside a reading of the body as a trope which doubles the restrictive expectations regulating Ruth's married life. A brief look at I.M. Young's feminist exegesis of the phenomenology of the feminine body offers one way of understanding Ruth's sense of being "trapped" and "pinned to one particular spot". Young argues that

> for feminine existence the body frequently is both subject and object for itself at the same time...Feminine bodily existence is frequently not a pure presence to the world because it is referred onto *itself* as well as onto the possibilities in the world.[19]

Adopting de Beauvoir's distinctions of immanence and transcendence as a framework for her discussion of feminine modalities of movement and space, Young seeks to show that "the [female] body is often lived as a thing that is other than it".[20] Her theory balances essentialist and constructivist positions: the physical, in Merleau-Ponty's theory of lived bodily experience, and the social, in de Beauvoir's theory of woman's position in patriarchal society.

Plath's work yields excellent examples of the 'thingness' which Young's theory consequently addresses. This objective quality is featured in much of the prominent imagery in Plath's late poetry, in which the body is often a

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[18] *SD*, p.18. Similarly, in *The Fat Woman's Joke*, Esther accuses her first visitor of dubious motives: "All you really want is to be in there watching. There's nothing here to watch. Just a fat woman eating." (p.13) Note the hesitation between "there" and "here" referring both objectively and subjectively to her own body.

[19] Young, Iris Marion, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.150.

[20] Young, p.149.

source of fear and a location of otherness. In a comment on the site of this sense of alienation which relates it directly to the gothic, Gabriele Schwab recognises that "it is not the cold exterior gaze, but the passionate interior gaze which exposes the abject not as other but as the innermost core of the self.[21] As if in an illustration of this view, the speaker in Plath's "Getting There" encounters the obstacle of her physical self, emphatically immanent in its corpse-like appearance:

> The place I am getting to, why are there these obstacles -
> The body of this woman,
> Charred skirts and deathmask.[22]

Here a sense of limitation and inevitability is conveyed by the female speaker's own body. In its 'thingness' or materiality, this figure neatly illustrates de Beauvoir's assertion that "since woman is destined to be possessed, her body must present the inert and passive qualities of an object."[23] In Plath's poem, corporealisation of this kind bears fatal consequences, an explicit comment on the effects of such circumscription.

The physical body isolated in this manner and seemingly divorced from the thinking subject, as in the case of the chokered woman, is similarly articulated in Weldon's *She-Devil* and Carter's *The Passion of New Eve.* Ruth wants to transcend the giant's body that is hers; Evelyn initially expresses the classic relation of masculine reason and feminine body in his early response to Tristessa. The first results in the choice of surgery, the second is played out in a masochistic fantasy before the 'penalty' of transsexual surgery is imposed on Evelyn by Mother. Indeed, the moment of horror for Evelyn occurs when he experiences his body as other. His physical transformation into a woman complete, the sense of disgust he feels at his own body is articulated through a direct comparison to Mother's: "I would wince a little at such gross

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[21] Schwab, Gabriele, "The Multiple Lives of Addie Bundren's Dead Body: On William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*" in MacCannell, Juliet Flower (ed), *The Other Perspective in Gender and Culture: Rewriting Women and the Symbolic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp.209-42 (p.217).

[22] ll.45-47. The ambivalence felt by a woman about her body in terms of maternity also finds expression in Plath's work; for example, in "Childless Woman", we read: "The womb/ Rattles its pod" (ll.1-2).

[23] De Beauvoir, p.189.

modulation of flesh that had once been the...twin of my new flesh." (*PNE*, p.77) Unlike 'real' transsexuals, Evelyn does not identify with the cross-gendered body which is fashioned for him. Instead, he experiences the same degree of outside/inside disparity which contributes to Ruth's unhappiness: "I stood, naked and a stranger to myself". (*PNE*, p.75)

Such incongruity is compounded by a sense of physical enclosure for Ruth. The objectification of the female body involves a peculiar orientation to the world, and Young's discussion of feminine bodily experience enumerates ways in which movement by the female body is hindered because of the self-reflective nature of the body as object. Her argument about feminine modalities of motility leads to a summary of modalities of *spatiality*, and to some conclusions about the positioning of the body which are applicable to an understanding of the body as gothic. First, it can be said that feminine existence "lives space as enclosed"; women simply do not use all the space available to them, and the space in which they do live is perceived as constricted space. Secondly, women are "positioned in space": they constitute the space which surrounds them ("there would be no space without the body", according to Merleau-Ponty[24]), but crucially they in turn are constituted by it. As an object, the body is in space, yet the feminine body is "rooted *in place*".[25] While this account approaches the subject of the body through lived experience rather than as a rhetorical figure, a phenomenological description is nevertheless an apt one here, because it values the subjective account of living in the body as much as the objective accounts provided, for example, by physiology or sociology. Young's essay, then, may be read in conjunction with other cultural explanations for why women feel conditioned to control their bodies and why they may identify the body with a sense of enclosure. Studies of eating disorders, for example, address the problematic relationship between women and their bodies, and significantly point to the desire in contemporary culture for an ideal body which is not just a thin body,

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[24] Young, p.152. Young's remarks are based on Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962). Merleau-Ponty's claim does not recognise gender distinctions - a qualification which Young's exegesis seeks to make.

[25] Young, p.153.

but, significantly, a "contained" body.[26]

In relation to Weldon's fiction, it is possible to see the two characters of Esther in *The Fat Woman's Joke* and Ruth in *She-Devil* experiencing a sense of bodily containment and enclosure within a social context of female experience. Indeed a comparison of the novels' central figure helps to clarify Ruth's sense of entrapment and the cultural values which she perceives 'written' across the female body. The body is regarded as a border by the female characters (Ruth, for instance, grows up "hardening the skin" (*SD*, p.10)), and it is when they choose to alter the condition of that border in some way (as bodies inflate and deflate in the two novels) that they can change their position in space and their relation to others; by making the border of her body mutable, the protagonist makes herself more mobile in space. Ruth's series of disguises and gradual physical transformation - her bid to "slip the old skin" (p.77) - occur in tandem with her constant shifts in location.

A figure of containment and potential source of female imprisonment, the body is overlaid with and stands in for other forms of restriction. In focusing on the parallels which arise between figures of the female body and figures of certain 'structures' (physical and institutional), we find that while the body's boundaries are made mutable, so too are the fixed metaphors associated with containment. Ruth's obsession with the "geographical detail of misfortune" (*SD*, p.8) prompted by this doubled sense of confinement echoes Esther's identification of the female body with the marital state, for example.[27] She tells Alan, "I don't want to be trapped in this body, this house, this marriage." (*FWJ*, pp.74-5) The implied equivalence between these entities further suggests that her body is not entirely her own property. Indeed, when Ruth destroys her house at No.19 Nightbird Drive she signals

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[26] Bordo, Susan, "Reading the Slender Body" in Jacobus, Mary (ed), *Body/Politics* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p.90.

[27] Plath's "Medusa" includes a similar conflation of house and institution, one which shares the gothic's preoccupations with Catholicism:

> Who do you think you are?
> A Communion wafer? Blubbery Mary?
> I shall take no bite of your body,
> Bottle in which I live,
> Ghastly Vatican. ("Medusa", ll.32-36)

the beginning of her own transformation. Similar associations between house and body persist when Father Ferguson's Rectory is leveled. Responsible for the Rectory's demise, having "brought about its death", Ruth approves of the "[d]emolition men [who] turn up from time to time to measure the house, as undertakers measure corpses for their coffins." (p.198) A subversion such as this, of social and psychological (and here, religious) structures as an act of female affirmation and escape, has been characterised by Howells as gothic, in a comparison to the razing of Thornfield depicted by Brontë and Rhys.[28] Certainly the common patriarchal disposition of these tropes, and their subsequent 'explosion' by a feminine force, points to a feminist perspective on a configuration of confinement familiar to traditional gothic writing. The innovation in fiction written by women after the period treated by Howells, comes from a discernible rendering of the female body as both representative of, and antagonistic to, structures which confine the female subject.

In contemporary writing, the feminist gothic further enacts subversions at the level of the sentence. Commenting on Weldon's *Remember Me* and *She-Devil*, Bronfen is in agreement with Barreca's notion of "metaphor-into-narrative" when she points out that these novels "enact what it looks like if the language that performs the tropes of femininity becomes reality."[29] As we have seen in the previous chapters, this is arguably a common practice in the contemporary feminist gothic. Weldon's *Fat Woman's Joke* affords an example of this literalisation, of cliché reanimated, which is relevant to the double trope of containment. When Alan's mistress, Susan, remarks on Esther's unrestricted eating habits, she associates levels of consumption with a woman's marital state: "If I was married...I wouldn't let myself go", she says. (p.15) Weldon plays on the meaning of this phrase, "let myself go", and its reference to the physical body. Customarily used in a negative sense, the phrase figures one of the central tensions in the novel - between containment

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[28] Coral Ann Howells, *Jean Rhys* (London: Harvester, 1991), p.114. Discussing *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Howells' contention that the gothic acts as a vehicle for "the covert expression of women's darker feelings of anger and revenge" is clearly applicable in this case; her definition of the gothic as a "feminine discourse", however, is overly simplistic.

[29] Bronfen, Elizabeth, "'Say Your Goodbyes and Go': Death and Women's Power in Fay Weldon's Fiction" in Barreca, Regina (ed), *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions* (Hanover, London: University Press of New England, 1994), pp.69-82 (p.73).

and freedom - which is enacted upon the body of the principal character. To lose control, the novel intimates, is in itself grotesque. Reading the metaphorical literally and thereby unsettling our assumptions about the structures which underlie those metaphors is a device typical of Weldon's writing. Although Esther's 'punishment' of her body does not result in the same degree of surface violence as Ruth's surgeries, nevertheless her motivation to change arises from a similar impulse to conform to cultural stereotype. In both cases, the place of resistance to and complicity in cultural structures proves to be the female body itself.

The contemporary theme of female body alteration is supported by a current of intertextuality that also serves to foreground a gothic reading of *She-Devil*. McKinstry inadvertently situates the novel in a gothic tradition, when she identifies a series of feminist literary revisions from *Jane Eyre* to *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *She-Devil* which feature themes of the inequality of marriage and limited power of the 'other' woman.[30] While her comparison illuminates a favourite theme of Weldon's - power relations between the sexes - it is perhaps the more specific gothic allusion in *She-Devil* which provides a direct comment on the unnatural aspect of Ruth's story. For the protagonist often appears similar to Frankenstein's artificially-assembled creature, and direct references to Shelley's novel make this definitive. The doctor's wife expects to greet "a female version of Frankenstein's monster" at her party, and has acquired the habit of addressing her husband as his more infamous predecessor: "Goodnight, Frankenstein". (*SD*, p.223) When, in her guise as Polly, Ruth undergoes her first surgical alteration, in Lady Bissop's opinion this makes her brow appear "more like Frankenstein's than ever" (p.144) (an instance of the equation of Shelley's scientist and monster in the popular imagination). Dr. Black himself, his sexual advances rejected, ultimately regards the reconstructed woman "as Frankenstein's monster, something that needed lightning to animate it and get it moving". (p.234) Presented as

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[30] McKinstry, Susan Jaret, "Fay Weldon's *The Life and Loves of a She Devil*: The Speaking Body" in Barreca, Regina (ed), *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions*, pp.104-13. McKinstry further suggests that in disguising "her self, her identity, and her body, Ruth takes on male power" (p.109), but we are then forced to ask, where does Ruth's alleged essential self reside during this process?

catastrophically 'unnatural' in Shelley's original, the usurpation of the female capacity to give birth is indicated rather obviously in Weldon's version when Mr. Ghengis thinks proudly that, "To transform the human body...[was] the nearest a man could get to motherhood". (p.214) Such Romantic aspirations are mocked by the camp exaggeration of what follows however; Ghengis imagines himself

> moulding, shaping, bringing forth in pain and anguish. True, the pain and anguish were not strictly his but his patients'. Nevertheless, he felt it. Nothing was for nothing. (*SD*, p.214)

Associated with the pangs of birth, this pain is subsumed into the process of beautification. Here the fashioning of the body ends in glib meaninglessness, while "for nothing" ironically points to the economic cost of the artificial 'luxury' of male maternity and female 'rebirth'.

The continued accentuation of the surface of the female figure nevertheless persists in questioning the nature of female identity negotiated through the body. The opposition of natural and constructed models of identity - dependent either on an invisible, essential 'core' or on the constructed veneer of the surface - is concisely expressed by the metaphor of the 'gift'. In this image, a male character attempts to uncover an 'essential' woman, when Mr Ghengis sees Ruth/Mary

> as a giant parcel to be unwrapped: the kind of parcel that was passed round at a children's birthday party, clumsily wrapped by a kind mother, in layer after layer of crumpled paper, the simpler for inexpert little fingers to unfold. And there, eventually, when the music stopped for the last time, would the treasure be! The gift, the present. (p.214)

Reminiscent of Plath's poem "A Birthday Present" (and its "no paper crackle" (l.34)),[31] the analogy of the gift to be unwrapped suggests a stripping away

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[31] In this poem, the female persona is secluded by white "diaphanous satins" (l.17) which seem to stand between a 'true' self and the world.

of layers to reveal a 'pure' woman, who will be a "treasure" and not "crumpled".[32] What makes Weldon's image so compelling is the allusion to the *textual* character of these surfaces, whereby skin exhibits the scriptural possibilities of paper, and on which cultural codes of feminine appearance and behaviour are projected.

Plathian overtones are again perceptible in this contemporary image, as one of her best known poems, "Lady Lazarus", includes a comparable spectacle:

> The peanut-crunching crowd
> Shoves in to see
> Them unwrap me hand and foot -
> The big strip tease. (ll.26-29)

The scopic drive to 'know' the woman in Plath's poem is reminiscent of explorations of the black figure's 'interiority' (discussed in Chapter 4), as a bid to understand or dominate the racial and sexual Other. Plath's scene alludes to the world of side-show, as if the woman, *a* woman, were a 'freak' - her gender a source of fascination in a normally male-oriented world. The metaphor of the "gift" additionally renders the implications of ownership conspicuous in Weldon's usage, as it does in Carter's "The Bloody Chamber". When the Marquis first strips his new bride, the heroine recounts this as a "[m]ost pornographic of all confrontations...my purchaser unwrapped his bargain." (*BC*, p.15) The female body is again reified in its arousal of curiosity and through this language of commodities. Thus, the metaphorical representation of skin as paper points to a textuality in the skin's reception and projection of images of femininity, whereby women's bodies are inscribed with, and restricted by cultural meaning (including fixed conceptions of

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[32] It is worth noting that patients seeking cosmetic surgery often "fantasize that the plastic surgeon has a kind of magic that will *restore* them to their *natural* state.(Some patients actually believe that the plastic surgery will leave no scar.)" That is, some people perceive themselves in the manner of Weldon's gift - covered in crumpled paper, but in actuality smooth and seamless underneath. Grazer, Frederick M. and Jerome R. Klingbeil, *Body Image: A Surgical Perspective* (St Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1980), p.21, added emphasis. Perceptions of the female body as an outer garment disguising or decorating its inhabitant are noticeably similar to the experience of women on diets, who believe they are "finding their real selves, unfettering themselves from bodies they didn't ask for". Lakoff, Robin Tolmach and Raquel L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.162. Lakoff and Scherr also propose that "overweight has become a spectre to most of us of truly terrifying configurations", p.168.

'mother' and 'wife'). In these instances, Carter and Weldon seem to point to a constructivist model of feminine identity, simultaneously challenging preconceptions of the 'natural' in relation to identity by making strange that which has come to be accepted as 'normal' and commonplace. The trope of the 'wrapped' woman then incorporates three substantial issues: the male gaze as an essentialising agency (illustrated in Chapters 3 and 4), transcendence of the female body as an escape from social and cultural forces which determine feminine identity, and the impossibility of discarding history which this notion of transcendence implies and requires. Plath's lyric rendering of this trope illustrates the desire for escape or transcendence:

> And I, stepping from this skin
> Of old bandages, boredoms, old faces
> Step to you from the black car of Lethe,
> Pure as a baby.[33]

Like Weldon's She-Devil, the speaker here presents an identity which dispenses with a 'damaged' self ("old bandages") and the "old faces" of a past life. The 'pure' state of "a baby" is echoed in Ruth's rebirth through which she hopes to erase her own history. Yet Plath's equation of this birth with *death* (the "black car of Lethe") is also explicit about the consequences and fantasy involved in the idea of transcendence, and suggests that its realisation is predicated on death - on the post-human - thus making it a state impossible for the living subject to achieve fully.[34] Striving to escape yet perpetually 'falling back' into the material body and its history constitutes a gothic experience in Plath and Weldon alike.

Contemporary representations of the surgically-altered body are informed by writing other than Plath's. In their preoccupation with definitions of what is 'natural', many nineteenth-century gothic texts raise issues similar to those surrounding cosmetic reconstruction. Hurley's study of late-Victorian fiction establishes a relationship between advancements in the social and medical sciences and the prevalent themes in gothic literature of the same

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[33] "Getting There", ll.65-68.

[34] Plath's image neatly expresses Ruth's wilful erasure of history, since in Greek mythology "Lethe" is a place of forgetting one's past life before reincarnation.

period. Evolutionary science, Morel's discourse of degeneration, and a rise in interest in criminal anthropology were among the alarming developments of which the public had a cursory knowledge. Hurley demonstrates how this climate influenced readers' reactions and the writer's choice of material at that time, and determines that "these new theories must have seemed 'Gothic' to the popular imagination."[35]

In a similar vein, Weldon exposes an area of science in *She-Devil*, in this case the practice of cosmetic surgery, as one which should be viewed as gothic, rather than glamorous. In doing so, her practice can be described as an inversion of the tendency to capitalise on readers' anxieties about the new sciences by confronting them with images which were compatible with established sources of fear or repulsion. Instead, Weldon uncovers the gothic in a 'scientific' phenomenon which is popularly considered attractive: the surgically-altered female body. Through the Frankenstein allusion, Weldon seems to imply that while nineteenth-century scientific practices seemed sensational, and therefore appropriate material for the gothic, twentieth-century scientific practices, particularly those with direct impact on the female body, ought to be seen as sensational (and gothic) where they generally are not. Consequently, Weldon's novel incorporates the pain and deformity experienced by the new Ruth, not just her accurate reproduction of Mary Fisher's likeness.

If we bear in mind Frankenstein's reanimation of the dead (composing his monster out of the material of corpses) while we read the story of the She-Devil's creation, we can compare the synthesized structure of this woman's body with the much earlier gothic fantasy. It is important to remember here that Ruth begins to live as 'Mary Fisher' only once Mary herself is dead. In one sense, Ruth brings Mary back to life. The plasticity of this reanimation is evident in that the rearranged body has not only been reduced but has also been increased with the strategic placing of implants, such as silicone and new teeth. (p.217) So, the composition of the 'new' body is made in part from

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[35] Hurley, Kelly, *The Novel of the Gothic Body: Deviance, Abjection, and Late-Victorian Popular Fiction*, p.6.

inanimate material; its tissue is both living and dead.[36] Here we may construe the reconstructed body as an example of the *post*human body, as the possibility of literally reconstructing a self becomes available to the postmodern subject. Weldon's reanimation of cliché - both of the stereotypical image of the beautiful woman and (in a possible example of Jameson's understanding of 'pastiche') of the gothic character of Frankenstein - effectively acts to reanimate the 'dead'. The linguistic 'mortality' of clichéd imagery, such as the beautiful Mary Fisher and her romantic "High Tower, on the edge of the sea" (p.5), in fact affords the most pertinent material for feminist reanimation such as Weldon's. Beauty "includes death's inscription", Bronfen argues, "because it requires the translation...of an imperfect, animate body, into a perfect, inanimate image, a dead 'figure'".[37] The 'perfect' images undone by Weldon's process of narrative reversal are not effaced in the reanimated version; rather, the disembodied image and its embodied 'familiar' coexist in the one figure.

The array of feminine stereotypes, then, negotiated by the central figure of Tennant's *Sisters and Strangers* (1990) is similar to those in *She-Devil* and *The Passion of New Eve*, including 'Madonna' and 'Eve', while yet another invocation of Botticelli heralds the completion of Weldon's reconstructed figure of Ruth: "there was something wonderfully new-born about her. 'She's like Venus...risen freshly from her conch-shell. Enchanting!'" (*SD*, p.222) In the figuration of the surgically-altered body in the novels of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, the "fantasy made flesh" (*SD*, p.224) becomes a source of black humour, what Weldon calls her "sick joke",[38] through the literalisation of metaphor and cultural ideals such as the preceding stereotypes. The re-introduction of pain, and by association, history - that which has been erased and sanitised in fairy tales for example - into cultural representations of femininity locates the gothic in the process of demythicisation. Weldon

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[36] Naomi Wolf, in focusing on the destructive elements of cosmetic surgery, points out that "surgeons call tissues on a woman's body dead so that they can profitably kill them." She neglects the 'enlivening' effects of surgery depicted by Weldon. *The Beauty Myth*, pp.235, 196.

[37] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, p.64.

[38] Weldon, *New Woman* (December, 1989), pp.112-13 (p.113).

emphasises the material process undertaken by Ruth in order to become the *image* of Mary, and shows that, although Ruth attempts to shed her own history as wife, mother, and "monster", the evidence of her past can still be detected in the map of tucks and scars on her body. The gothic emerges in the revelation of violence underlying the image of 'perfection', as Weldon in a sense re-historicises her protagonist *and* 'deconstructs' the cultural image coveted by her.

The socio-cultural context which has legitimated the practice of plastic surgery appears to be the same one that subscribes and perpetuates the idealised images of the female body.[39] Accordingly, *Sisters and Strangers* and *She-Devil* share an allusion to Andersen's Little Mermaid tale, further emphasising the mythical nature of the ideal feminine body. Tennant's character embodies a postmodern amalgamation of classicism, *haute couture*, fairytale, and pop:

> Eve tried everything. She had her face remodelled entirely, and her hair dipped in honey gathered from the bees of Mount Athos, where no woman has ever been seen. She had a new outline to her body drawn by Christian Lacroix; and the requisite surgery to make herself that outline - which was somewhere...between a mermaid and Playmate of the Month.[40]

The quintessentially postmodern female body includes the images of the mermaid and the centrefold, both belonging to a cultural vocabulary of feminine stereotypes, as equally influential myths on definitions of the feminine.

In *The Passion of New Eve*, Evelyn is meant to learn to be a woman by viewing depictions of the Virgin and child throughout "the entire history of Western European art" (p.72) and shares the commodified identity of Tennant's New Eve in *Sisters and Stangers*: "They had turned me into the *Playboy* center fold." (*PNE*, p.75) In Carter's novel, New Eve's body has been designed by Mother to be the epitome of perfect femininity as determined by

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[39] See Susan Bordo for a discussion on "Plastic Discourse", the language of body politics, in "'Material Girl': The Effacements of Postmodern Culture" in Goldstein, Laurence (ed), *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) pp.106-30.

[40] *Sisters and Strangers*, p.163.

social norms, yet it is clear that Evelyn regards the process by which this appearance of perfection has been achieved as grotesque in itself. S/he cannot forget that her present body is a manufactured one:

> I had been born out of discarded flesh, induced to a new life by means of cunning hypodermics,...my pretty face had been constructed out of a painful fabric of skin from my old inner thighs. (*PNE*, p.143)

Eve feels both awe and disgust at her new identity; memories of the grotesque process of construction mean that she responds negatively to her new feminine gender. The artificiality of the constructed body is reflected in the descriptions of Eve's performative behaviour: she contrives an autobiography, a miniature gothic narrative of "a cruel mother who kept me locked in the coal-shed, a lustful step-father" with added "detail from Faulkner". (p.87) Her sexuality is similarly imitative: during the consummation with Tristessa, she is careful to mimic a woman's pleasure "heretofore, seen but never experienced". (p.147) The encounter with the drag queen further underscores this artificiality, since when Eve looks into the face of Tristessa, she is instantly reminded that they are "mysteriously twinned by [their] synthetic life". (p.125) Like Leilah's which is "neither flesh nor fowl", the replicated body exhibits a composite quality which marks it as freakish, and which in turn underscores the synthetic nature of performative identity (as demonstrated by Evelyn and Tristessa), a conception of identity often regarded as postmodern.[41]

In focussing on the *process* whereby 'whole' and 'perfect' images of femininity are achieved, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon re-invest a materiality into the idealised, frequently abstract, appearances of these images. The scars and memories of pain in the physical construction of the living image of "Eve" for instance, also disclose the *history* in her apparently ahistorical construction. For the name "New Eve", appearing at the end of *Sisters and Strangers* as well as the title of Carter's refashioned protagonist, effects, in its tautology, an effacement of the body's history. Similarly, an erasure of history

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[41] See Docherty, "Postmodern Characterization: The Ethics of Alterity" in Smyth, *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain*, cited in Chapter 2 in relation to Tennant's *Queen of Stones*; and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*.

to disguise previous forms and modes of existence is illustrated by Ruth's self-generative nature: "A she-devil has no memory of the past - she is born afresh every morning." (*SD*, p.159) Ruth destroys the evidence of her own history as a crucial step in the process of her redefinition. New Eve similarly announces that she feels "as if I'd just given birth to myself." (*PNE*, p.75) Interestingly, this impulse of annihilation is not unfamiliar to most (male-to-female) transsexuals who seek to conceal the male part of their history once they embody a stereotyped femininity. A denial of history is, according to Bordo, also characteristic of the postmodern 'plastic' body.[42] Taking the performer Madonna as an example of the drive for self-creation, Bordo asserts that "Madonna's new body has no material history; it conceals its praxis, it does not reveal its pain."[43] Moreover, such "*outlawing* of history" is symptomatic of contemporary culture's esteem for the 'spectacle'.[44] By depicting the materiality of bodily experience and construction, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon reveal the 'secret' of the fictionalised self as frequently gothic in its methods of creation. Thus it is the history behind the appearance of the transsexual figure Eve, including violence and pain, which is disclosed in *The*

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[42] Another erased history or identity in these novels is the maternal. Plath expresses a similar incompatibility between an image of femininity and motherhood: "Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children./ Cold as snow breath, it tamps the womb." "The Munich Mannequins", ll.1-2. It is worth noting that cosmetic surgery is often chosen as a means to disguise the signs of aging - another form of denying history. Accordingly, Naomi Wolf points to cosmetic surgery's typical client's urge "to kill off the age in herself". *The Beauty Myth* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), p.196.

[43] Susan Bordo, "Material Girl" in Goldstein, p.126. Similarly, in a discussion of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Mary Ann Doane points to the robot-woman, Rachel's "perfect" identity because she was "born all at once, deprived of a past or authentic memories". Doane, "Technophilia: Technology, Representation, and the Feminine" in Jacobus, Mary, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (eds), *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourse of Science* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), pp.163-76 (p.172).

[44] Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London & New York: Verso, 1990 [1988]), p.15.

*Passion of New Eve.*[45]

Through the narrated history of the altered body, the traditional identification of the grotesque with the manifestly composite body is relocated in the pristine surfaces of the culturally-proscribed image of femininity itself. Accordingly, the would-be-hidden violence behind Ruth's perfection is instead graphically disclosed in the narrative:

> They broke her cheekbones...they trimmed and altered the line of the jaw bone. They took hairless skin from her rump and grafted it along the hair line, taking it back to give her a smooth, clear brow. (*SD*, p.216)

The language here - "They liquidised and drew off fat" (p.219) - approximates that of cosmetic surgical discourse itself which certifies that "fat can be mobilized" and reports that clients commonly consider the abdomen an "acquired deformity".[46]

The significance of pain is likewise featured, as *She-Devil* follows the structure of a popular fairy tale. The Little Mermaid endures the pain described as "treading upon sharp knives" in the Andersen tale for an express purpose: she desires an immortal soul usually only attainable by humans.[47] Ruth suffers the same agony - "with every step it was as if she trod on knives" (p.238) - in order to transcend her natural body. The pain she experiences is physical but the body she acquires is the *idea* of a body, the conceptualisation

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[45] In this respect, Carter's novel reproduces a strategy commonly found in actual transsexuals' autobiographies. Like Weldon's She Devil, they too have extensive surgical treatment in order to pass as the 'perfect' woman. The fictional 'autobiography' of Evelyn in *The Passion of New Eve* may be read as an example of the disclosure of the historical self, of the evolution of subjectivity-as-process. Such disclosure has recently been termed "*post*-transsexual"; see Stone, Sandy, "The *Empire* Strikes Back", p.299. I discuss Carter's novel as a fictional 'autobiography' of transsexualism in "Unexpected Geometries: Trangressive Symbolism and the Transsexual Subject in *The Passion of New Eve*" in Bristow, Joe and Trev Broughton (eds), *The Infernal Desires of Angela Carter* (Longman, June 1997).

[46] Grazer, Frederick M. and Jerome R. Klingbeil, *Body Image: A Surgical Perspective* (St Louis: The C.V. Mosby Company, 1980), p.20.

[47] "The Mermaid" in Andersen's Fairytales (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993), p.13.

of feminine beauty.[48] As a replica of Mary, she is "all woman because she is no woman" (*SD*, p.158); that is, she is an image of femininity rather than an individual.

According to Glavin, Weldon does not "approve" of her character Ruth: "She says that *She-Devil* is about envy and its corrosive power."[49] Critics have mainly side-stepped this theme of envy in Weldon's novel. Yet envy is also the mermaid's motivation for undergoing her painful transformation; like Ruth, she does not choose metamorphosis for the reason of love.[50] The motive of envy, furthermore, directs our attention to the importance of class in Weldon's novel, since while the figure of the reconstructed body focuses themes of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, animate and inanimate, it also comments on the commodification of beauty as it can be 'bought' by the wealthy.[51] Ruth envies Mary Fisher's success and wealth as much as her place in Bobbo's affections. It might be possible therefore to read *She-Devil* as a reactionary text purporting to show the gothic effects of class boundary transgression.[52] Ruth's plan after all is a matter of economics as much as

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[48] The body has been used as the site of conflict in a grotesque revision of the Cinderella myth too: instead of cutting her feet to fit the glass slipper of privilege (as the Wicked Step-sisters do in certain versions of the fairy-tale), Ruth has the entire body cut and designed to fit the princess persona. See Paulina Palmer, *Contemporary Women's Fiction* (London: Harvester, 1989), pp. 32, 34. Palmer reads Weldon's perspective on this trope as radical feminist. According to Marina Warner, in the Grimms' version of the tale "the sisters hack off their toes, hack off their heels to fit the slipper" and a chorus of birds sing "there's blood within the shoe". Warner also outlines the Chinese story of Cinderella, "Yeh-hsien" in which the tiny gold shoe is an image of wealth to country people who had to go barefoot and which "reverberates with the fetishism of bound feet". See *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p.203. Connotations of class privilege are made explicit in Weldon's story in which the commodity of beauty can be bought only by the wealthy. Indeed, one 'myth' of Naomi Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth* is that the forms of beautification she considers are available to, and chosen by, women irrespective of economic class.

[49] John Glavin, "Fay Weldon, Leader of the Frivolous Band" in Barreca, Regina (ed), *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions* (Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 1994), pp.133-51 (p.139).

[50] Envy is in fact a prominent feature in novels by the other two writers under discussion, as in the case of Tennant's protagonist in *The Bad Sister* who claims "She had what I wanted". (p.76)

[51] As the title of Leslie Field's beauty book, *Look Like A Million* (St Albans: Granada Publishing, 1978), suggests, a 'perfect' female appearance is associated with, and often dependent on, personal wealth.

[52] This form of class transgression is akin to certain interpretations of *Frankenstein*, as we saw in Chapter 1. See especially "The Politics of Monstrosity" in Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

beautification, and an ambiguous moral follows Ruth's achievements.

It is precisely this equivocal response by the narrative to Ruth's deeds which questions the parameters of Weldon's feminism, intimates that any single view of the novel is problematic, and consequently challenges the appropriateness of the term "feminist" gothic in relation to this particular novel. Bronfen characterises the coincidence of "critique and complicity", a central feature of *She-Devil*, as "ghostly hysterical duplicity" in women's writing generally.[53] Weldon's unorthodox approach to the subject of cosmetic surgery is epitomised in a 1989 article entitled "Why Fay Weldon approves of the Tuck Shop".[54] We have seen how *She-Devil* can be read as an anti-surgery, feminist statement; yet the article, published six years after the novel, seems instead to suggest that Weldon is an advocate of such surgical intervention. The article offers this proposal to the woman reader: "If you can't change the world, change yourself."[55] The rejection of a strictly biological, that is, maternal identity: "A woman, left to nature...is dead before the menopause" leads to a consideration of the cultural images of feminine identity available to women. Yet Weldon does not eschew all notions of an essential self. Repeating the connotations of the metaphor of the gift, Weldon suggests that by subscribing to the effects of cosmetic surgery, "Little by little we approach ourselves". Finally, in a direct comment on her earlier novel, Weldon plainly declares, "I'm on Ruth's side"; a 'non-feminist' reading of *She-Devil* is supported by Weldon's article if we read its pronouncements as sincere.

However, a closer reading reveals that certain features work against the article's apparent predilection. One is the ironic context of Weldon's piece -

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[53] Bronfen, "'Say Your Goodbyes and Go': Death and Women's Power in Fay Weldon's Fiction", Barreca (ed), *Fay Weldon's Wicked Fictions* (Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 1994), pp.69-82 (p.78). Bronfen suggests that what "radically irritates us, is that these heroines [such as Ruth] gain power by confirming to excess the cultural formations that were shown to turn them prematurely into inert and meaningless beings." (p.73)

[54] *New Woman* (December, 1989), pp.112-13. The pun on "tuck shop" humorously reproduces the associations of economic class with cosmetic surgery, since the reference to school sweet shops is specific to English public schools.

[55] *New Woman*, p.113. This echoes Ruth's decision in *She Devil*: "since I cannot change the world, I will change myself." (p.56)

a magazine called *New Woman* - in which it appears alongside articles such as "Diet 2000" and "A Right Royal Affair".[56] Another concerns aspects of Weldon's style; she gives a mocking account of a surgeon's wife who receives 'material' gifts of "A new bottom for Christmas, a slice out of her thighs for Easter" until she is "reborn in the spirit of his desire" and "gleamed and beamed like the doll she was and wished to be". The infantilisation of the doll simile, coupled with the sing-song effect of the rhyme ("gleamed", "beamed"), undermines the summons to exercise self-control over physiological 'defects'. Weldon recognises, and professes, the conflict between moral prohibition and an envious desire ("the doll she was and *wished* to be") that some women feel in response to the issue of cosmetic surgery. Brief flashes of a kind of Plathian language contribute to an undercurrent of dissent from the ostensible message of the article: "Carve me up, Mr Doctor, tighten me, trim me, *glorify me*. Hold back time, Mr Doctor." Resonant of Plath's "Herr Doktor" (of "Lady Lazarus"), this allusion reproduces a paradox found in Plath's own poetry, of the concurrent rejection of a patriarchal force, and attraction to, or complicity in, a masculine model of desire. This dilemma echoes the theme of complicity which was evident in preceding chapters. If "male desire seeks to immobilize, to *petrify* the female body",[57] then the character Ruth and the imagined surgeon's wife of Weldon's article both participate in this petrification. Ruth confirms Mr. Ghengis' concern that the reconstructive surgery is a challenge to God's power by declaring, "I am remaking myself", (*SD*, p.233) while the beaming "doll" has fully embraced her husband's vision of femininity, "reborn in the spirit of *his* desire". Authors of their own pain, the final irony is that although discarding a maternal identity, 'birth' pain nevertheless remains their provenance. Finally then, Weldon's acknowledgment that cosmetic surgery presents women with complex questions about desire and subjectivity typifies Carter's and Weldon's engagement with contemporary issues affecting women;

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[56] This sense of irony is compounded by Weldon's comments on the cover of Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990): "A vivid and impassioned polemic, essential reading for the *New Woman*: word-of-warning to the Glamorous, course-enhancement for the feminist". (emphasis added)

[57] Buci-Glucksman, Christine, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* trans. Patrick Camiller, intro. Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1994 [1984]), p.100.

they engage in a feminist cultural politics which is sophisticated enough to address these problematic issues (particularly those related to heterosexual female desire).[58]

Their contemporary portrayals of physical alteration indicate a broader context of cosmetic surgery, as such body 'science' has become revalued in the postmodern era as body 'art'. Reflecting the designation of a 'posthuman' period, Carter's character Donally claims that "[t]attooing is the first of the post-apocalyptic arts, its materials are flesh and blood." (*H&V*, p.125) The Count in *Doctor Hoffman* boasts of similar such self-fashioning mutability when he tells Desiderio, "I am an artist; my material is the flesh", and further, in an observation pointing to the composition of subjective transcendence, "[m]y anguish is the price of my exaltation". (p.126) These fictional pronouncements on body manipulation correspond to current trends in contemporary performance art. The French artist, Orlan, has been using her own body as a canvas, instructing surgeons to alter her body in the stylised environment of art galleries while she reads aloud from theorists such as Kristeva. Exploring masculine fantasies of femininity in her physical acquisition of specific features of classical images, including Botticelli's *Venus*, Orlan is neither celebrating nor condemning cosmetic surgery. Instead, her performance enacts the same kind of disclosure that we have seen in the narrative 'construction' of New Eve and the She Devil, as she is

> exposing [cosmetic surgery's] secret alchemies for the manufacture of appearance by demystifying its private rituals in a carnivalesque performance in the operating theatre, and by...a daily report on process and another series of visions of the face that challenge its decorporealisation as 'mask', 'image', masquerade.[59]

Orlan is intent on 'capturing' this moment when subjectivity is in "process", when it is neither situated entirely in a corporeal self, nor lost in abstract "image". Challenging our preconceptions of the inside/outside relation, this

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[58] Critics such as Duncker overlook the sophistication of such a project, believing instead that simplistic heterosexist constructions are being promoted rather than critiqued. See Duncker, Patricia, "Re-imagining the Fairy Tales: Angela Carter's Bloody Chamber", *Literature and History* 10 (1984).

[59] Pollock, Griselda, "A Carnal Art?: Orlan", *Portfolio: The Catalogue of Contemporary Photography in Britain*, Issue 23 (1996), pp.56-57 (p.56).

female artist sites the trauma occasioned by the gothic dichotomy in the posthuman body. Her attention to a 'demystification' of images through a revelation of "manufacture" or process shares a literary exploration of feminine images and their construction.

Contemporary debates about these culturally-determined, gendered images intersect with the gothic in Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's writing. In *The Passion of New Eve* for example, Sophia notes, in preparation for Evelyn's surgery, "[a] change in the appearance will restructure the essence" (p.68); while in *She-Devil*, the surgeon worries when Mr Ghengis 'improves' Ruth's genitals: "It seems an interference with the essential self." (p.219) A fundamental issue in debates about gender identity, this disparity between surface appearance and an essential self again highlights the performative model of identity represented in many of these novels.[60] In "The Bloody Chamber", the site of this "essence" makes explicit the focus of biological essentialism in the scene where the heroine is 'unpeeled' and all that remains is her "scarlet, palpitating core". (*BC*, p.15) Male desire as a reductive force is parodied in the figure of the Marquis as a "gourmand" who takes the "leaves off an artichoke". (p.15) In a repetition of the 'paper woman' metaphor above, these imaginary depictions of the anatomy of a subject point to the explorations common to these novels of the constitution of female identity, and to the anxiety aroused by the uncertainty of its location or individuality. In Plath's "Tulips", a voice declares, "I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses/ And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons." (ll.6-7) History temporarily erased and the body undergoing transformation, who is speaking in this poem, and from where? The elements of identity here enumerate abdications identical to those made by Ruth, and the preceding lines might be read as a summary of Ruth's own endeavour of renewal.[61] What Plath's successors inherit from her work is precisely this

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[60] In *She-Devil*, throughout the process of change, Ruth adopts other identities in order to enact her plan and it is eventually difficult to tell which character traits are hers (with the possible exception of the drive for revenge); she seems to be all of these women, as well as the "two Mary Fishers" (p.239), and yet none of them.

[61] These lines from Plath's poem are also seemingly echoed by Carter's Eve as he/she becomes accustomed to a new appearance: "Even my memories no longer fitted me, they were old clothes belonging to somebody else no longer living." (*PNE*, p.92)

dynamic of the possibility and impossibility of transcendence of the physical body. These are the questions raised by Carter and Weldon, too, (who is speaking and from where?) in novels which bring together the literary fantastic and a theoretical subject area of body politics to underscore the enigmatic and temporal nature of a coherent identity. Eve(lyn)'s act of narration, for instance, seems to confirm Ricoeur's contention that 'we attempt to discover and not simply to impose from outside the *narrative identity which constitutes us*'.[62]

The disorientating effects of an elusive sense of stable identity is accentuated in a conspicuous, material construction of the self. In depicting the body in submission to technology, these contemporary novels by women present composite, 'posthuman' figures. Not restricted to the genre of science fiction, the repetition of this figure may reflect a broader cultural realisation: "[W]e are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs."[63] As Haraway suggests, in the techniques of corporeal manufacture we are moving ever closer to a totally fabricated body, and consequently in the work of these writers there are numerous depictions of robotic female creatures. Ruth herself is described in terms of an automaton: "Everything worked. Her eyes shone and glittered; her lips were moist." (*SD*, p.225) Tennant's *The Crack* locates a doll-like woman (also a wronged wife who has become 'perfect') in an apocalyptic future who relentlessly pursues the narrator. Rene Mangrove, product of the "decadent twentieth century" (p.45), has "perfectly fashioned plastic arm[s]", a smile which spreads "at 1.5 millimetres a second", and an "A1 skin graft". (pp.46-47) Recognised as the antithesis of the 'natural' woman with her "prophetic hair and fighting muscle" (p.45), the mechanical woman on stilletto heels is the epitome of the pin-up of "magazine covers". Here hyper-femininity is engineered by an exaggerated sense of its own construction. *The Crack* parodies the other extreme of 'natural' women, too, but Tennant's novel, by

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[62] Ricoeur, Paul, 'Life in Quest of Narrative' in David Wood (ed), *On Paul Ricoeur* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 32.

[63] Haraway, Donna J., *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p.150.

portraying Rene Mangrove as the revenge-seeking figure in a horror film relentlessly pursuing her victim, accords with the horrific image in Carter's *Doctor Hoffman*, where posthuman female figures are perceived by Desiderio as "sinister, abominable, inverted mutations, part clockwork, part vegetable and part brute." (p.132) Indeed, Rene's grotesque status is not left in doubt; beaten into shape by the sun, her two-dimensionality is indisputable: "Her nose and lips flattened into a gargoyle grin." (p.118) An apocalyptic view of femininity follows the literalisation of the "*idea* of the female"; these posthuman creatures are simultaneously "as circumscribed as a figure in rhetoric" *and* the grotesque embodiment of such rhetorical configuration. (*DrH*, p.132) Haraway identifies this same curiosity as typical of the late twentieth-century when, she argues, "machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed".[64]

The disclosure of violence and the re-historicising of cultural images used to define the female body, amounts to a de-mythicisation similar to the semantic technique of metaphor-into-narrative. Presenting an image, and then reading 'backward' to reveal the construction of that image, these examples of the sculpted body enact a form of autobiography. Often narrated in the first person - Ruth's story of vengeance, Eve's account of the New World traveller's transformation - the novels can be understood as a form of *prosopopeia*, in which the 'already dead' are speaking.[65] In my application of this rhetorical figure, the body of the female protagonist speaks the mortality of the perfect image she has become. She speaks to the lost self - of Evelyn's maleness, and Ruth's 'ugliness', both now disguised in, or even excised from the new image. Even as the process of beautification and idealisation are disclosed in these novels, the narrative also keeps alive the lost, 'dead' other of the self. As the figure of Eve and Ruth-as-Mary attempt

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[64] Haraway, p.152. In fact, her definition of a cyborg offers a possible description of the self already discussed in Plath's late poetry: "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality". p.150.

[65] De Man, Paul, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). See "Autobiography As De-Facement", pp.67-82. De Man defines the figure of prosopopeia as "the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech." (pp.75-76)

to '*de*face', in de Man's terms, their former selves, the account of their history reconstructs the former self, and its 'face'. The inanimate image, in being animated, rouses a buried past. Appropriately, Orlan too has suggested that her performance-surgeries convey "the impression of an autopsied corpse that continues to speak".[66] Challenges to cultural images of femininity, then, through these strategies of disruption of 'perfect' or conventional images, can be said to constitute postmodern incarnations of the living-dead as revived phantoms of meaning.

## II. 'A Precarious Glimmering': The Wax Model

> A thicket of shadows is a poor coat. I inhabit
> The wax image of myself, a doll's body.
> - 'Poem for a Birthday', "Witch Burning", ll.2-3

In addition to the images from fairytale and the media which act as prototypes for the sculpted body, waxwork models appear in Carter's and Weldon's fiction as templates for both the construction and the perception of the female body. The present section considers depictions of the female body in several manifestations of the waxwork figure. Faurschou has remarked on the pertinence of this trope in the contemporary period:

> [i]n these inanimate figures [models and mannequins], the idea of glamour goes beyond the perfection of the body, its making-up, dressing up, and even cutting up in plastic surgery - toward death itself.[67]

The wax model consequently stands as a pivotal trope in a discussion of this 'logic' of glamour: across this figure we can trace a number of meanings within a spectrum from a material presence of the body to an immaterial absence of the body. The impression of embodiment in the wax model gestures back to the sculpted body, while an appearance of disembodiment anticipates the

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[66] Orlan, *Orlan Conférence*, Manifesto accompanying Portfolio Gallery exhibition (1996), p.12.

[67] Faurschou, Gail, "Fashion and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernity" in Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise (eds), *Body Invaders: Sexuality and the Postmodern Condition* (London: Macmillan, 1988) pp.78-93 (p.85).

spectral body of the film star (discussed in the last section of this chapter). It is possible to discover in the wax model a paradox inherent to the representation of a self that is at once material - a "doll's body" - and transcendent of that materiality - a "thicket of shadows". To "inhabit" an image which conveys this duality, then, involves an implicit measure of self-distance, a division that will prove unmistakable in Carter's treatment of the wax figure.

The model of "flexi-wax, threaded through with plastic sinews and veins and bones" (*SD*, p.218), against which Ruth's surgeons measure their progress, underscores the mutability of the flesh presented in the scenes of bodily alteration discussed above. In *She-Devil*, the waxwork model is rendered in miniature and for a distinct narrative purpose. Just as Philip's manipulation of the marionette of Mary Queen of Scots expresses his control over Margaret in *The Magic Toyshop*, the doctors' "play" with the wax figure mimics their intervention in the contours of the patient's body. Both of these female characters are perceived as, and through, the doll image, a perception which equates the inanimate replica and the living woman. Carter's young heroines, notably Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop* and Marianne in *Heroes and Villains*, commonly experience a loss of identity in terms of being a doll. This loss is echoed in *Doctor Hoffman* when Desiderio encounters the River People among whom "all the women moved...like benign automata, so...it was quite possible to feel they were not fully human". (*DrH*, p.73) Carter's description of Albertina in this novel shares an affinity with Ruth's model of wax in *She Devil*. In contrast to the Swiftian centaurs encountered by Desiderio and Albertina, the humans appear to themselves to be diminutive, inelegant and incomplete: Albertina "had become a doll; a doll of wax, half melted at the lower part."[68] Here too the wax figure represents a perception of the self as displaced or objectified; significantly, the appearance of the pliable wax figure precedes an episode of physical pain (Albertina's rape by the centaurs) just as

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[68] *DrH*, p.176. Admittedly this is not restricted to the female body, as Desiderio similarly thinks that he is a "misshapen doll". Nevertheless, distinctions between live bodies and wax replicas collapse earlier in *Doctor Hoffman* when Desiderio and the Count visit the "House of Anonymity" where "the prostitutes, the wax mannequins of love, hardly seemed to be alive" (p.131), perhaps commenting on the 'deadening' effect of such sexual objectification.

the wax doll is mentioned in *She-Devil* in anticipation of Ruth's surgeries. An emphasis on the materiality of the body, the experience of it as a 'thing', can, as here, leave the subject feeling self-distanced through objectification. One use of the wax model in these novels, then, is to convey what Moers called the "living corpse" of the self.

This purpose, however, emerges as postmodern in character. The waxwork figure is not new to gothic writing; indeed, its contemporary manifestations serve as a possible measurement of the genre's transformations. Associated with the supernatural and its wizardry, the wax model originally functioned as a prop of suspense and a test of characters' superstitious beliefs. In Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, for example, Emily's terror at seeing a corpse behind the black veil is ultimately ridiculed when the source is shown to be a waxwork figure:

> Had she dared to look again, her delusion and her fears would have vanished together, and she would have perceived that the figure before her was not human, but formed of wax. The history of it is somewhat extraordinary, though not without example in the records of that fierce severity which monkish superstition has sometimes inflicted on mankind.[69]

Here the wax figure has been the cause of horror dependent on the character's and reader's suspension of disbelief, specifically attributed to Catholic mummery and ornamentation. In postmodern fiction the wax figure now induces a disconcerted 'horror' of superficiality. For the ghosts and technologically-simulated bodies in the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon no longer belong to the supernatural realm or provoke the emotive projections of Radcliffe's character. Instead, the intentional deception belonging to the apparently dead body is foregrounded; it is the wax figure itself which is fascinating and disturbing. Indicative of this postmodern aesthetic effect is Eve's sober response, in *The Passion of New Eve*, to the scene which confronts her within Tristessa's mausoleum of apparently dead bodies: "The corpse was not a corpse at all. It was a cunningly executed waxwork." (*PNE*, p.117)

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[69] Radcliffe, Ann, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1794]), p.662. As Victor Sage points out, this explanation is firmly associated in the text with Protestant rationalism, and this dynamic of opposing religious affiliations is a persistent one in gothic literature. *Horror Fiction*, p.30.

Uncertainty about the corpse's status has been only fleeting, and the peculiar artistic habits of the recluse immediately replace this uncertainty as the source of disquiet and curiosity. If we imagine these lines immediately following Radcliffe's scene above, one aspect of the contemporary response to earlier gothic becomes clear in respect of the issue of belief. Ghosts or imitation cadavers, for instance, are now recognised as obviously devised projections and direct our attention towards the act of simulation itself rather than towards the horrific subject which it intends to represent.

The contemporary character of Carter's images is obvious in their form, since Tristessa's corpses bear resemblance to figures familiar in postmodern culture such as Marilyn Monroe and James Dean. Indeed, the picture which Carter presents in the "Hall of the Immortals" affords a literary counterpart to Arbus' photographs of human replicas in Madame Tussaud's museum. These two artists share both an attention to the convergence of history and fantasy in their portrayal of waxwork figures, and a love of kitsch. The setting of their vision of contemporary gothic, for instance, is distinctly kitsch; from her first novel, Carter pictures an artificial and faded milieu - the house of the "plastic lily" (*ShD*, p.132) - which in turn is similar to the chapel in *Heroes and Villains* decorated with "plastic flowers cracked with age and half-melted". (p.71) Even Catholic imagery, a fundamental component of 'high' gothic literature, appears here recast as shoddy and artificial in its postmodern incarnation. In addition, Carter and Arbus each aestheticise the waxwork figure by foregrounding its grotesque appearance; the waxwork in contemporary fiction is inevitably contextualised by Arbus' collection of iconic "freaks". Hence, the associations of the wax model have altered from those of horror, Catholic superstition, and half-disclosed secrets of the early gothic novel, to those of the freakish grotesque, cool rationalism, and the ostentatious display of the simulated body.

The specifically contemporary effect of realistic replications of the body in a plastic medium is further elucidated by Jameson's argument that such an art form is representative of the postmodern condition. To characterise the nature of perception in the postmodern period, he adopts the example of the American artist Duane Hanson's human statues in polyester, *Tourists* (1970).

According to Jameson, the viewer experiences a "moment of doubt and hesitation" in which Hanson's simulacra appear to be real, living beings, while fellow viewers of the statues seem, however briefly, to become simulacra themselves:

> The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density.[70]

What connects this moment of "derealization" to the gothic is Jameson's reading of its indeterminacy ("is this now a terrifying or an exhilarating experience?") through an appropriation of the aesthetic category of the sublime.[71] Yet, more germane to a discussion of postmodernist fragments of the gothic, he intimates a connection between the postmodern world's "glossy skin" and an ostensibly 'posthuman' figure. In fiction of the late twentieth-century the simulated body effects a disquieting challenge to basic perceptions of reality.

Frequently the response to images of the simulated body outlined by Jameson results in a "dissociated point of view" akin to that which Sontag finds in Arbus' work: a "perfectly deadpan" reaction to the unusual.[72] Often employed in fantastic (or magic realist) fiction, this dissociated tone characterises the style of Carter's *Doctor Hoffman*. When Desiderio is disturbed by the Minister's increasing disruption of reality principles such as time and space, there is no experience of horror:

> whether the apparitions were shades of the dead, synthetic reconstructions of the living or in no way replicas of anything we knew, they inhabited the same dimension as the living...they screamed and whickered at me - and yet I did not believe in them. (*DrH*, p.17)

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[70] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York & London: Verso, 1993 [1991]), p.34.

[71] Jameson refers to Sontag's understanding of "camp" as a point of entry into a discussion of the contemporary sublime and its non-Natural, technological Other, without tying the notion of camp explicitly to the disorienting effects of Hanson's work. For a discussion of the sublime in relation to postmodernism, see Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

[72] Sontag, *On Photography*, pp.33,43. The "dissociated point of view" which distinguishes Arbus' photographs, is comparable to the narrative tone frequently used in these novels in highly stylised depictions of the 'monstrous' or grotesque. Sontag argues that Arbus' work "lies within the Warhol aesthetic" which positions itself between the "boring" and the exotic. (p.44)

This last comment stands in contrast to the excerpt from Radcliffe in terms of the question of belief, but, more importantly still, it is the perceptibly 'real' world which here causes the "moment of doubt and hesitation" instead of the isolated gothic prop that terrifies Emily. Where the living and the dead are indistinguishable from one another since both may be embodied as "synthetic reconstructions", the banality of response indicates a lack of surprise at seeing the unusual. At a time when "[m]ystery and miracle are indistinguishable from technology",[73] the dead look life-like and the living may be dead; the world of simulacra and the world we perceive as real are not, it seems, absolutely distinct.

The contemporary appearance of the waxwork figure in Carter's fiction then is already overlaid with connotations of 'hyper-surface'. This connotation is realised in relation to the female body specifically in two incarnations of the waxwork replica: the 'perfect', dead, feminine body and the pornographic body, both of which explore definitions of femininity and frequently coincide in the same image. The first of these figures is featured in the closing episode of Carter's first novel *Shadow Dance*, which in its stylised formation prefigures the mausoleum scene in *The Passion of New Eve*. After Honeybuzzard has disappeared, Morris and Emily discover Ghislaine's murdered body in the decaying house:

> On the table lay a mound...At each of the four corners of the table burned a candle...Naked, Ghislaine lay on her back with her hands crossed on her breasts,...Her eyes were shut down with pennies, two on each eyelid, and her mouth gaped open a little. There were deep black fingermarks in her throat. (*ShD*, pp.176-77)

She is arranged in the same pose as Tristessa's waxworks in the later novel, although here it is an actual dead body which is on display, in a frame of funereal candles.

The violence which marks Ghislaine's body is initially absent in the exquisitely fashioned wax replicas featured in *The Passion of New Eve*, but within Carter's vocabulary of images, her original trope resonates in the

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[73] Columbus, Claudette Kemper, "The Heir Must Die", *Modern Fiction Studies* 32 (Autumn, 1986), p.410.

figures which appear embalmed in the Hall of the Immortals. The figure of Ghislaine suggests a conscious gothic design in its stylised presentation that anticipates the high camp of the 'dead' figures in *The Passion of New Eve*. (The fact that stars of both genders are represented in the waxworks does not preclude a reading of Carter's scene in terms of its figuration of femininity; it is possible to consider the male stars included in Tristessa's collection 'feminine' insofar as both Ramon Navarro and James Dean have been culturally 'feminised' through their status as gay icons.[74]) While some of the celebrities figured by the waxworks were in reality murdered, evidence of physical violence is not marked on the wax replicas; instead, the means of their deaths are recounted in the narrative. It is only after the opening description of the artificial mausoleum that the wax bodies are physically assaulted, as Zero's group violently dismember them.

Beyond this intertextual echo from her own first novel, Carter's employment of the wax model takes multifarious forms, drawing on sources of broad cultural significance. While the wax figure in contemporary women's writing succeeds an appearance in traditional gothic literature, its tropic history significantly encompasses the figure of the 'dead' female body. In a study of recurrent representations of the dead female body throughout literature (in Poe, for example), fairytales (such as Snow White and Sleeping Beauty), and the visual arts, Bronfen has argued that within the perfected form of the figure of the dead female body, "the two enigmas of western culture, death and female sexuality, are here 'contained'", and the wax model realises this containment in "a cleansed, purified, immobile form".[75] We have already seen how the fixity inherent to feminine stereotypes promotes a

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[74] It is tempting to mark a parallel, in terms of the disturbing combination of violence, camp, and homophobia, between the scene in *PNE* when Zero's group attack Tristessa's house and Kenneth Anger's account of the murder in 1968 of Ramon Navarro, who died with "the lead Art Deco dildo which Valentino had given him forty-five years earlier thrust down his throat...[the culprits] tore the place apart, ripping to pieces the mementoes of his long career, which meant nothing to the greedy cretins." *Hollywood Babylon* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1986 [1975]), p.284.

[75] Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.99. Bronfen bases her comments about the wax model on those displayed in *Museo Zoologico della Specola* in Florence. Avoiding the term "gothic", Bronfen's study of the 'dead' figure in general nevertheless relies heavily on literature which belongs to the genre.

"petrified" appearance of the body. Despite their apparently immobile, paralysed form, these images can be seen to 'speak' in a sense.[76] The iconography of a female figure again articulates a set of cultural values, and these values, evident in both literature and the visual arts, invite feminist analysis in their perpetuation of a patriarchal, hegemonic conception of the feminine.

Among the cultural prototypes for the figures that appear in Carter's writing we can count the wax models of human anatomy. These were originally used by the medical profession in the late eighteenth century, a time when a wax replica provided a "cleansed" alternative to an actual, putrefying corpse. A variety of extra-scientific discursive fields, including pornography, education, and sculpture, converge across these models.[77] The anatomist's model is not simply functional, but has a distinctly aestheticised form.[78] Combining a perfect exterior with a grotesque interior, the model may look like a classical figure - complete with pearl necklace and carefully arranged hairstyle - while at the same time containing layers of waxen inner organs revealed by opening the figure's chest.[79] (See FIGURE 8) The models of the Florentine museum *La Specola*, cited by both Gilman and Bronfen, usefully demonstrate the cultural significance of the trope of the 'dead' female body as a focus for questions about the nature of representation and the constitution of femininity - themes explored in Carter's writing.

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[76] Bronfen herself points to the "allegorical articulation" of repressed desires and beliefs which find expression in the figure of the dead or sleeping woman. See her discussion of the "figurative speaking" of allegory, p.9.

[77] The Marquis de Sade visited a similar collection of wax models in Italy, recorded this visit in his journals and then transposed his impression into his novel *Juliette* for pornographic effect. See Sander Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989), pp.189-90.

[78] For example, in his discussion of the wax models in a collection in Florence, Gilman records that the Museum of Natural History where they are displayed was co-founded by an obstetrician who was both a surgeon *and* a sculptor. This suggests a telling combination of interests in the female body - in both its surface and its depth - a dual focus reflected by the cosmetic-surgeon characters in *She Devil*, who had previously been a gynaecologist and a garage mechanic. (*SD*, p.173)

[79] Interestingly, when Bronfen briefly discusses these models, she does not choose illustrations showing the figure from above with the various panels removed, an angle which seems to show a woman disemboweled. Instead, she includes photographs which are taken from the side, thus minimizing the potentially horrific effect of the model's appearance and emphasising its resemblance to the figuration of Sleeping Beauty.

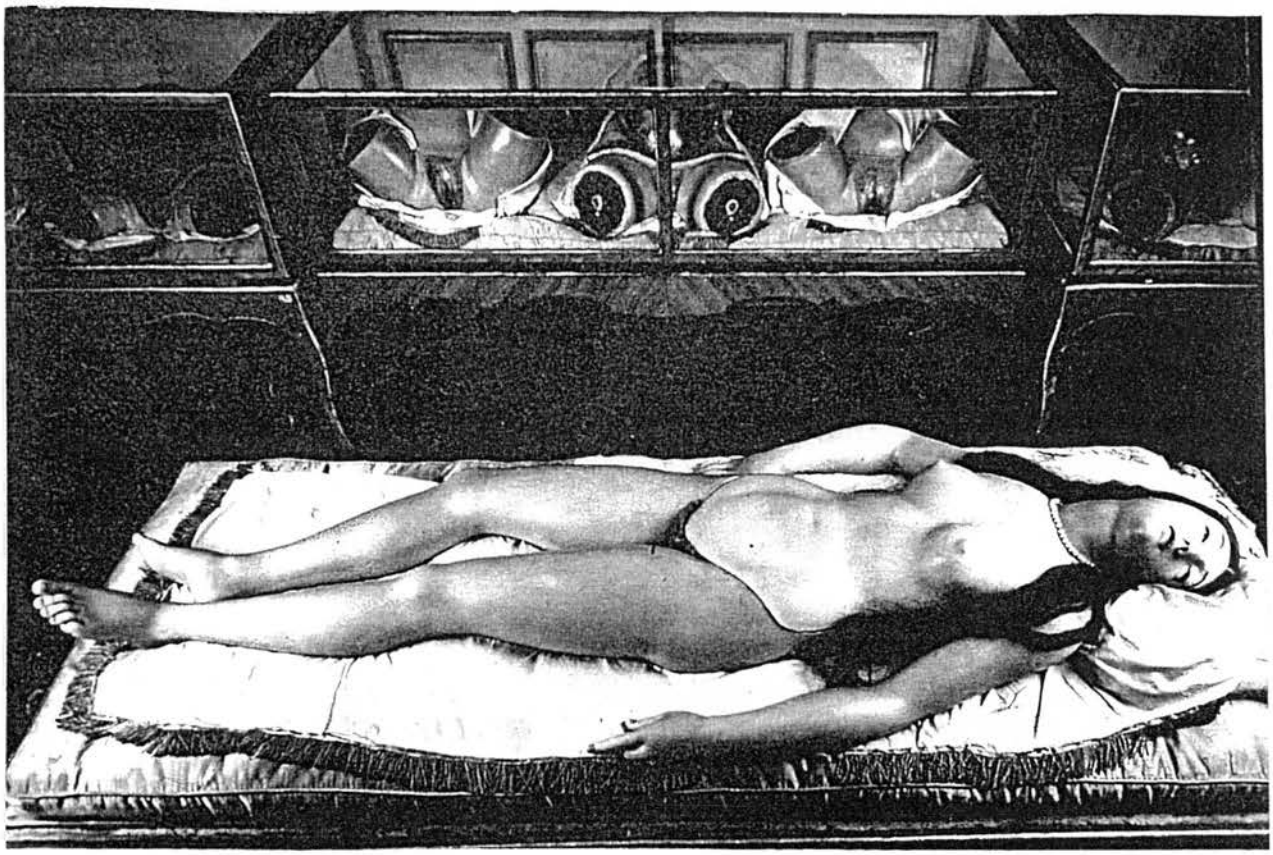

FIGURE 8

The wax models in *The Passion of New Eve* share, for example, the surface perfection of the anatomist's model. While violence to this formal integrity follows later in the narrative, the attention to beauty in the wax figures is immediately established when Evelyn first admires Tristessa's creations, marvelling at the careful artistry in their construction:

> we were in an entire hall of waxworks, all in [glass] coffins, all with candles at their heads and feet. These waxworks were executed with great fidelity in the detail. The translucent fingernails had been inserted with meticulous precision; each hair stuck individually into the scalp; the curve of each nostril was as sweet and perfect as that of a petal...the figures looked more life-like than ever. (p.117)

Their presence invoked in this artificial form, the Hollywood stars now appear 'more real' than they did in the flesh. Not only does this hyper-reality have an effect similar to Hansen's polyester figures, whereby Evelyn experiences a moment of 'de-realisation', but it also draws attention to the act of looking itself. The stylised formations of Carter's wax works, like the Florentine model, determine the response of the viewer. Prominently framed by candles at four corners and encased in glass, the bodies are both art objects and exhibitions in a sideshow, both conventionally aesthetic and freakish.[80]

Bronfen outlines a cultural response to the dead figure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the deathbed scene was comparable to "a picture gallery" and "the wax museum conflated the fascination for the preserved dead body with aesthetic pleasure".[81] The sideshow of "simulated corpses boxed up in glass like very precious cakes" (*PNE*, p.118) reproduces the central emphasis on the gaze evident in both the story of Snow White and the appearance of the *La Specola* wax model in its glass case. An aesthetic history of the trope of the dead and beautiful woman necessarily informs Carter's treatment of this figure. In *The Passion of New Eve*, the case holding each figure is like a frame, thereby accentuating the fact

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[80] Andrew Ross notes the difficulty in making this contrast. While Sontag positioned the freakish as the "anti-aesthetic", in fact she "colonized" these images into a liberal aesthetics in much the same way as American cultural imperialism around the world (Ross notes Vietnam). Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), p.113.

[81] Bronfen, p.87.

that the model is an exhibit and draws the 'look' onto itself, as it "elicits an aesthetic viewing"[82] - much as the veil in Cranach's *Venus* paintings induce the viewer to admire the nude female figure behind the transparent covering. Bearing in mind Sedgwick's advocation to consider the surfaces of images, the veil and the framing device warrant attention equal to the subject towards which they gesture. In fact, Carter constructs a number of images which reflect this dual focus. The frame of glass which functions to elicit the "aesthetic viewing" eventually merges with its point of reference - the body itself -as we will see in *Doctor Hoffman*, where Desiderio observes his "visitor with flesh of glass". (p.26)

The aesthetic pleasure derived from these carefully crafted waxworks by their creator and by Eve, can be explained to a large extent by the image of stability presented in their forms. The apparent 'frozen' quality evinced by both beauty and death, as Johnson suggests, seems to deny the possibility of fragmentation or disintegration which conventionally threatens the subject as material body.[83] This sense of assurance makes possible the aesthetic response. Consequently, in *The Passion of New Eve*, the mobilisation of the inert figure, particularly of "the most beautiful woman in the world" (p.129), shatters this pleasure and constitutes an experience of gothic in the novel. The 'deconstruction' of this conventional trope is achieved by the disclosure of violence in the narrative, often coloured by the excesses of black humour. Identifying several scenes as gothic in *The Passion of New Eve* depends primarily on the representation of male violence on the beautiful female body. According to Rose, "the perfect body of the woman is a target of fantasy and aggression",[84] a view which is borne out by the male characters' treatment of the principal female characters in Carter's novel. Evelyn and Zero regard the 'perfect' film star, Tristessa, in precisely these terms, while Eve (as a

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[82] Bronfen draws a connection between Snow White, a body lying in state, and a museum exhibition piece. (p.100)

[83] Johnson, Barbara, *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

[84] Rose, p.9. Rose argues that the picture of a model featured in a 1960 collage designed by Plath confirms this, and Plath's contextualisation of this figure in the collage may be read as a visual precursor to many of the themes and cultural references developed thereafter in the *Ariel* poems.

perfect 'woman' herself) is subjected to ill treatment by Zero and the Children's Brigade in the desert. Zero's group attacks the visible integrity and coherent identity of both 'women' through assault and parody.

The impulse of this aggression finds precedents in fictional scenes already discussed, such as Evelyn's mistreatment of Leilah in the opening of the novel, and throughout the history of the visual arts. The anatomist's gaze in late nineteenth-century painting is, according to Bronfen, "as dangerous to her [the female corpse's] integrity as the physical contact that will lead to exposure and dissection".[85] In his role of patriarch, Zero poses much the same danger as his gaze turns into real dismemberment. As we have seen elsewhere, "the 'surveyed' feminine body is meant to confirm the power of the masculine gaze",[86] and proof of the power of this gaze frequently involves an attempt to penetrate the 'impeccable' surface of the iconic feminine body; hence the violation of the wax figures by Zero's troupe who violently dismember them.

Such fragmentation of the (female) body resulting from desecrated 'perfection' is fetishized elsewhere in Carter's work. Evelyn's description of Leilah's legs (the "tragic" indentations made by the mesh stockings (*PNE*, p.24)) returns in the more explicit context of a porn show, in which a headless body wears only "a pair of black stockings" and legs without a torso sport "spike-heeled, black leather pumps". (*DrH*, pp.45, 44) Such added detail compounds the fetishization already in play in the dismembered female body, as an imagined end to the trajectory of the male gaze. The analogy of the Florentine model again proves instructive. For surrounding the wax "venus" figures are *pieces* of female bodies. The legs and vaginas, arranged in their own glass cases, may be regarded as the metaphorical counterpoint to the 'perfection' of the intact figures, as if they express the corollary of the gaze that is induced by the 'sleeping beauty' figure.[87]

Zero literally dissects Tristessa (by destroying the images of her likeness

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[85] Bronfen, pp.10-11.

[86] Bronfen, p.102.

[87] Bronfen seems to overlook the significance of these bodily cross-sections in her analysis of the 'whole' bodies in the foreground of her illustrations.

and then disrobing her), in a bid to discover the 'meaning' of her femininity. A comparable desire is suggested in the construction of the wax Venuses, as they afford an opportunity of seeing beneath the 'sleeping beauty' exterior. While Bronfen is right to point to the sealed quality of these artificial bodies and the issues of surface and depth (insofar as the models were intended "to afford access to a truth of human existence"[88]), she elides an issue of maternity in omitting one of the most telling details of their construction. For the ultimately defining role of 'woman' is indicated by certain models in their inclusion of a foetus at the body's centre.[89] The desire to discover a 'meaning' in the female body (reminiscent of de Certeau's "legible space" of interiority[90]) finds a counterpart in *The Passion of New Eve* when Zero unwraps Tristessa to discover 'who she is', and learns that she is in fact a man in drag. The unveiling of the transvestite displays traces of the gothic in two senses. First, Tristessa's response to this disclosure - his/her "wailing echoed round the gallery of glass" (p.128) - indicates an experience of the abject as the somatic boundary between discrete identities is transgressed. Second, the layers which 'disguise' her are invested with intertextual references to the gothic. Just as Eve and Tristessa are refracted into hundreds of repeated images of themselves in the dressing-room mirror, the image of their marriage is treated similarly in the narrative as the wedding clothes the couple are wearing invoke the film star's past performances.[91] Allusions to canonical gothic texts, here reproduced on film, include "that dreadful marriage scene in *Wuthering Heights*" (p.133) and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher.* (p.6) Tristessa's performative character incorporates the gothic heroine; crucially, in this guise she has *died* many times. An early film still shows her as

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[88] Bronfen, p.99. It is also unclear whether it is in fact Bronfen herself who has called them wax "Venuses".

[89] Gilman identifies the intention of an exploration of the Florentine wax model: "As her layers are removed, we move to the center of the male gaze, the fetus [*sic*]." Gilman, *Sexuality*, p.184.

[90] Discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to discovering the 'meaning' of the black, female body.

[91] Indeed in dressing Tristessa in the wedding dress she once wore in a production of *Wuthering Heights* and Eve(lyn) in the evening suit intended for the character of Frederic Chopin in the story of George Sand, the heterosexual relations between them are maintained and repeated by the mutually exchanged gender characteristics since Sand was renowned for her masculine attire and behaviour, while Chopin was popularly thought to be a feminine man.

Madeline Usher, "wearing the bloody nightdress" (p.90), "ethereal in her shroud, just risen from her coffin" (p.6), while Zero's raid on the star's wardrobe yields "the square-necked dress of black velvet in which Tristessa, as Mary, Queen of Scots, had been decapitated". (p.131) Having played the roles of dying heroines, Tristessa in the present moment seems to embody repeated resurrections.[92] In the scene of his/her violent exposure, the layers of *feminine* identity - Plath's "day clothes" of quotidian performance - are borrowed from texts of the gothic.

Further explorations of gendered identity in Carter's novel are occasioned by the disruption of the sanitised image of the 'sleeping beauty' figure and the stable identity it suggests. As well as participating in a strategy of "metaphor-into-narrative", insofar as a fixed image is disturbed, Tristessa's imitation of a waxwork also presents "unexpected geometries" of gender identity in the process, because the secret at the heart of this postmodern version of the gothic castle is 'his' transvestism.[93] In a twist on the Bluebeard story, the inert bodies are all on display in Tristessa's mausoleum, giving an immediate clue through their exaggerated status to the secret at the heart of the glass house. In the interchange of the real and the simulated, Tristessa's impersonation of the dead figures establishes a metonymic relation between herself and her artwork; artist and embalmer, she figures her own simulated nature in the wax figures. Hence, the literal fragmentation of the wax figures mirrors the metaphorical dismantling of Tristessa's fame and femininity. The results of this 'deconstruction' are disconcerting. The intruders gather together the scattered limbs that have been dismembered

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[92] Intimations of the 'living-dead' status of Hollywood stars found in Carter's *Doctor Hoffman*, such as "Mary Anne, the beautiful somnambulist" (*DrH*, p.48), looks forward to Mailer on "Norma Jean" or Marilyn Monroe: "she was a somnambulist walking around". Norman Mailer, *Marilyn* (London: Chancellor Press, 1992 [1973]), p.27. Mailer quotes Monroe's drama coach. Mailer is both pessimistic and fascinated in response to the place of cinema in American culture when he writes, "the vision of the American frontier has gone into a light-box and come out as ten-foot ghosts upon the screen."

[93] Sandy Stone has pointed to the challenge posed by the representation of the transvestite/transsexual identity: "In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries." Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" in *Body Guards*, pp.280-304 (p.296).

from the models in order to furnish inanimate witnesses for the mock wedding:

> they put the figures together haphazardly, so Ramon Navarro's head was perched on Jean Harlow's torso and had one arm from John Barrymore Junior, the other from Marilyn Monroe and legs from yet other donors -- all assembled in haste, so they looked like picture-puzzles. (*PNE*, p.134)

Along with the scene at the swimming pool, in which fragments of indeterminate gender are seen floating, "rendered permanently anonymous" (p.142), this act of desecration constitutes part of the novel's challenge to notions of 'natural' gender identity. Through images of the grotesque in both scenes, Carter reveals not only the constructed nature of gender but also its disturbing cultural effects when perceived as indistinct or acquired.

Clearly, the image of the wax model refers to more than ghosts and scientific instruments; it is also a side-show attraction. This context is established in the model's appearance in Weldon's novel; rather than displaying the 'perfect' shape of Mary Fisher, the flexi-wax model of Ruth in *She Devil* represents Ruth's body while it is a medical curiosity. Repeating her earlier role of freak, during the transformation process Ruth appeals to onlookers in search of sideshow attractions which include "two-headed dogs and giant mice". (*SD*, p.233) In Carter's *Doctor Hoffman* the wax model again belongs to a sideshow, this time of portentous horrors. A series of emblematic scenes in this novel, the blind man's exhibition of three-dimensional horrors, further illustrates the distinctive qualities of postmodern gothic. In fact the exhibition displays the imagined results of the desecration of the sleeping beauty figure, as it showcases the fragmented female body. In *Doctor Hoffman*, the consequent images inscribe a sense of the contemporary gothic in terms of black humour, a postmodernist view of the conventional genre in an emphasis on artifice, and Carter's consciously baroque style.

The scenes capture an uneasy balance between playfulness and horror through wax displays of dismembered bodies. The pornographic nature of the exhibition - "pay your quarter, do your business" (p.43) - is undermined by Carter's use of the absurd and understatement. Exhibit Three, for example,

presents

> two perfectly spherical portions of vanilla ice cream, each topped with a single cherry so that the resemblance to a pair of female breasts was almost perfect. (p.44)

The mocking insistence of "perfect" and what Bronfen has called Carter's "rhetoric of explicitness",[94] foil any gratuitous rendering of the pornographic image, and reconfigure it as parody. The flat tone of Carter's descriptions evoke Jameson's concept of postmodern parody in that they seem to have no definitive target; these images neither censor pornography nor celebrate it.

Just as figural complicity in colonialist paradigms was an issue in the previous chapter, so here the representation of the fragmented female body in the context of pornography warrants brief attention to determine its qualification as postmodern. Despite the novel's grotesque representations of the female body, it might be argued that in one sense *Doctor Hoffman* reflects the preoccupations of feminist visual artists of the same period in which Carter was writing. As Tickner has documented, many women artists featured a "*de*-colonizing of the female body" in their work in the 1970s; they sought to subvert patriarchal imaging of the body and to create what she terms a "vaginal iconology". To wrest back the "geography" of women's bodies has been a self-conscious response to a perceived 'disappearance' of the female body within a male-authored iconography, and the "reintegration of the female genitals into art", according to Tickner, "has thus been a political, rather than a directly erotic gesture".[95] It is possible to situate Carter's sideshow of fragmented bodies within this feminist arena insofar as she clearly engages with the tension implicit between traditional forms of representation of the female body (and, indeed, of the male body) and alternative configurations. Carter's writing, however, does not make a choice between an "erotic gesture" and feminist politics; desire and its innumerable manifestations have a central place in her fiction and non-fiction alike. Her work openly declares the significance of the erotic for (heterosexual) women and simultaneously assails

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[94] Bronfen, p.424.

[95] Tickner, Lisa, "The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970", *Art History* 1 (June, 1978), pp.236-51 (pp.239, 241-42).

clichés of male-authored desire.

Descriptive aspects of the novel are more clearly postmodern. The contrived artifice of Exhibit Four, "a *wax* figure of the headless body of a mutilated woman lay in a pool of *painted* blood" and Exhibit Five, which shows the suspended head of this woman, "with no *strings* or hooks in sight",[96] diffuses the horror of the decapitation. The attention to its cheap manufacture flattens the effect of these displays and evinces a postmodern fascination with the artificial. Carter deftly captures the interactive relation between the effects of humour and horror, entitling the female decapitation, "Precarious Glimmering, A Head Suspended From Infinity". (p.93) The extravagance of this caption prefigures the excess of Mother in *The Passion of New Eve.* For Desiderio the sideshow exhibits conduct lessons in desire in a manner similar to Evelyn's treatment in Beulah where he is 'taught' the meaning and form of femininity through similarly exaggerated means.

Arguably postmodernist and feminist in character, Carter's imagery certainly marries these two interpretive modes when depicting the gothic. In *Doctor Hoffman*, the Count's manner is coloured by a "black, tragic humour" which in turn is associated with an excessive "stylization" and intense "unnaturalism" (p.123) - both of which are indicative of Carter's own stylistic proclivities. Such stylized treatment also comments on the gothic in contemporary fiction. A closer look at one of these scenes in particular elucidates the gothic's orientation. Exhibit One displays a woman's legs and vagina rendered in "pinkish wax", and the viewer's gaze is intended by the exhibit's construction to penetrate the interior where, in a parody of the conventional characterisation of women as essentially procreative, an exaggerated scene of fertile nature has been constructed. The conclusion of the viewing rests on "the misty battlements of a castle...[whose] granite viscera housed as many torture chambers as the Château of Silling." (p.44) Here, a sign of the gothic is *literally* located in the female body. The core figure is yet another "house", another body, and one of terror. Again the gendering of this scene establishes the male gaze as an agent of potential or figural penetration,

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[96] pp.45-46, added emphasis.

a view of woman as other and discoverable, and is another scene reminiscent of the drive to explore the 'meaning' of the black, female body (discussed in Chapter 3). In a similar way, the inside of the female body is projected as a *geography*, a terrain which ultimately accommodates an image of horror. Carter's image refers to a conventional source of horror (parodying the clichés of the female body and the mysterious gothic house as sites of horror), but transforms this into a postmodernist cryptogram. The depth hermeneutics invited by conventional gothic texts are given a physical shape in her novel, and the initial invocation of horror is transformed into humour. The contemporary gothic in this image is finally revealed in terms of a joke. Indeed, in this scene the gothic emerges from a nexus of themes: the idea of the freakish sideshow, the waxwork figure as prop of horror, and again the (mis)perception of the female body as a gothic edifice itself. Turning to consider the cinematic body we begin to see that the most compelling effect of the wax model figuration is its reflection on the operations of representation. For depictions of the wax form of the posthuman body accord with Bronfen's argument that

> the self-reflexivity of representations of death is such that they point not to any one fixed object..., but rather to the process of hermeneutics and signification.[97]

## III. The Mausoleum of the Image

> Now she is flying...
> Over the engine that killed her --
> The mausoleum, the wax house.
> - "Stings", ll.56, 59-60.

Plath's image of the "wax house" can be read as a metaphor for the system of representation, for the cultural "engine", which produces fixed images of women such as Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. An imagined inhabitant of this "mausoleum", both in its figurative 'frame' and in its literal structure, is the subject at the centre of Tennant's *Faustine* and Carter's *The*

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[97] Bronfen, p.85.

*Passion of New Eve*. Although published fifteen years apart, both novels portray a dead Hollywood star whose death is projected within a house of memorial. The narrative in each case focuses on the star's apparent absence, as other characters search for her lost 'meaning' or presence. The elusiveness of each female protagonist is principally a result of the visual media through which they are represented, including film, photographs, and painting. Associated with cinematic projection in terms of their identity, Lisa Crane and Tristessa are also described as 'screens', onto which concepts of gender and ontological uncertainty are mapped. The two writers present an exaggerated figure in order to explore the enigma of an identity that is constituted through an oscillation between 'presence' and 'absence'. A comparison reveals that in both novels the cinematic figure focuses themes of the gothic, the postmodern, and representations of the female body. Accordingly, this section first addresses signs of the traditional gothic and of postmodern culture's investment in replication and symbol, before showing that the gothic and the postmodern can be reconciled through the matrix of camp. From this point we can consider the implications of the spectral presence inscribed in both novels, and its relevance to a condition of representation and to the figuration of female subjectivity.

Hidden in the Californian desert, Tristessa's glass mausoleum with its secret display of images from the Hollywood past is strikingly similar to *Faustine*'s "mausoleum of the image" (*F*, p.56), where Ella goes in search of her grandmother's identity and finds a shrine to a Hollywood star. In Tennant's novel, the house which holds Lisa Crane's memorial is initially described in conventionally gothic terms: it has "dark corridors" (p.23), the "door sighs shut" (p.24) behind Ella who enters the maze of the house, she must decipher certain signatures including that of the "parchment manuscript" (p.25), and she feels a "prisoner" who must "escape" the "web" (p.34). The novel's structure follows the exploration of "the slumbering house" (p.29), as the confrontation with the monstrous occurs when Ella is shown "the final room". (p.107) As the novel's title suggests, the secret finally revealed is that of diabolism. It transpires that a pact with the devil has transformed Ella's

grandmother into a Hollywood star of eternal youth, fixed both in forms of media representation and a preserved physical existence. Tennant modernises the familiar gothic structure, however, in the historical specificity of the missing woman's identity, as the dead or absent female figure belongs to the world of Hollywood films.

The "life-in-death chamber" of *Faustine*'s shrine to movie fame is an elaborate "mausoleum" wherein a sense of the past is so commanding it "choked any idea of the present-day or the mundane". (*F*, p.29) Locked in the past, then, images of the extraordinary similarly dominate Tristessa's mausoleum in *The Passion of New Eve*. A sense of stasis combines with the exotic to create a strange 'other' world; "a sort of Hollywood forty fathoms down under the trees" where the inhabitant is as alluring and "as lovely as a Lorelei, Jean Harlow-fair". (*HH*, p.136) A precedent in Victorian gothic corresponds to this drowned isolation and to the equation of body and house which emerged in relation to the "sculpted body" (in section I). Dickens' description of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* includes a metonymic series of the 'body' of her petrified wedding cake, her own ghostly, crumbling existence, and the house in which she lives. The metaphors associated with Tristessa's solitary existence echo this figuration: "She lived in her own wedding cake, had burrowed deeply into its interior. She lived in her own mausoleum." (*PNE*, p.112) Miss Havisham's embodiment of virginity and death together is also perceptible in Carter's characterisation: Tristessa has "cheated the clock in her castle of purity, her ice palace, her glass shrine". (p.119) In *Great Expectations*, Pip finds the decayed wedding cake in a room where "the clocks all stopped", and fears that Miss Havisham may imminently mimic her own death by lying on the table in place of the cake, becoming "the complete realization of the ghastly waxwork at the Fair".[98]

We have seen in Carter's novel that the Hollywood recluse lives in a circular glass construction. Connotations of interment invoked by the glass house are made explicit in Carter's story "The Merchant of Shadows". Here,

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[98] Dickens, Charles, *Great Expectations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965 [1860]), p.113. The image of the crumbling wedding dress - in *Heroes and Villains* for instance - derives explicitly from this source, as we noted in Chapter 2 in a discussion of gothic echoes in Carter's writing.

in an avowal of the image associations reviewed by Bronfen, a retired "Spirit of Cinema" lives in a "glass box that looks like nothing so much as the coffin for a classical modernist Snow White".[99] The glittering construction of Tristessa's glass house appears to be a postmodernist incarnation of the dark and gloomy mansion of conventional gothic; at first the house conceals the secret of the reclusive occupant by means of its reflective surfaces, flashing its "own, cold light" (p.110).[100] The star and the glass house both manifest the theme of replication - arguably the principal focus of both female characters. Thus one description of Tristessa's hideaway - "The ghost of her moonlit house trembled in the water" (p.112) - not only constructs a romantic location, but recommends a postmodernist logic in which visual reflection is the location of ghostliness.

In Carter and Tennant, a contemporary medium of visual representation does indeed convey an impression of the ghostly. They have transposed the image of the "picture gallery", used by Bronfen to describe the trope of the deathbed scene, into the twentieth-century form of the moving picture "still". The female stars at the centre of these mausoleums are imbued with a sense of the postmodern through the media of their representation and a contemporary preoccupation with replication; that is, they are both 'postmodern' and 'postmodernist'. The sixties' world of Lennon, Hendrix, and Warhol colours Tennant's revision of Faust. Similar to the mirrored multiplication of the heroine in Carter's "The Bloody Chamber", the infinite replications of Lisa Crane's image bear a recognisably postmodernist stamp: "The sophisticated, world-weary Lisa who Warhol doubled and trebled, reproduced a thousand million times around the globe". (*F*, p.57) Citing Warhol's portraits of Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, the narrative makes plain the spirit in which the cinematic body is depicted by the artist; accordingly the context of Lisa Crane's appearance includes:

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[99] Morrow, Brad (ed), *The New Gothic*, p.186. This short story is essentially a condensed version of Tristessa's narrative in *The Passion of New Eve*.

[100] Architecture stands as the most representative of postmodernist art forms, according to Jameson, and Carter's image is not entirely unrelated to his argument that "distorting and fragmentary reflexions of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central role of process and reproduction in postmodernist culture". *Political Unconscious*, p.79.

> the repeating images, the Warhol look-alikes, the freaks and funnies from his sad circus of urban-deformed. Does Lisa not understand she is one of them too; that to this artist she is a sacred horror, as funny and repellent as the fat lady or the druggy young girl? (*F*, p.77)

Like the wax model, the cinema star belongs to the side show in terms of the freakish. Her enigmatic embodiment of the immaterial and the material transforms Lisa to a "sacred horror". Yet here the identity of the freak is a direct consequence of this infinite repetition of images. An effect of such replication pertinent to Carter's and Tennant's purposes is outlined by Ross, who suggests that Warhol's pictures were "trashy tributes to the demise of the star system, while the images themselves were created by means of the mass production techniques endemic to the making of that star system."[101] Amidst this process of technological manipulation, the subject and its representation in the image become increasingly distanced from one another, until the effect produced through replication is of a 'free-floating' sign - a symbolic, technological body. Commenting on the hermeneutic impasse produced by Warhol's work, Jameson contends that his repeated images evince the principal characteristics of postmodernist art and thus are "clearly fetishes".[102] The "depthlessness" of the female images in these novels, confirmed by the Warhol comparison, inevitably lends them a heightened sense of surface-as-meaning.

Investing such a remote image of the beautiful film star with a material body (implicitly denied beneath the image), Carter and Tennant embody what is seemingly disembodied - the icon - and thus point to new spectres in our culture, new meanings of the 'living dead'. Both texts are emphatic about the symbolic implications of the central figure and the status of the spectacle: "A face as the ultimate symbol". (*F*, p.25) The opening pages of Carter's novel proclaim a comparable interest: "symbols themselves have no control over their own fleshly manifestations...the nature of our life alone has determined their forms." (*PNE*, p.6) 'Deconstructing' the phenomenon of the symbol in her

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[101] Ross, p.166.

[102] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp.58-60. Jameson lists these characteristics as (1) depthlessness, (2) weakening of historicity, (3) new emotional tone of "intensities", and (4) technology.

depiction of its cultural manufacture, Carter employs the cinematic figure for its exaggeration of certain features belonging to this process. Film theorists have identified one such feature, in attesting to the surface effects signified by cinematic representations: "One part of a fragmented body [such as Garbo's face]...gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude, to the screen."[103] Just as Evelyn is 'haunted' by "the face of Tristessa, a face as tall as [Leilah]" (*PNE*, p.23), in Tennant's novel, "Crane's face is everywhere". (*F*, p.30) The impression made by this Hollywood symbolism is summed up by Barthes, when he states that images of Garbo belong to a moment in cinema history when "the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh".[104] Barthes' perception actually describes what is a 'post'-human state - an *idea* of the flesh which is *beyond* materiality.

In their choice of the cinema star as the central "ghostly" presence in *The Passion of New Eve* and *Faustine*, Carter and Tennant explore the cult of this perfect "Garbo" face: Carter's novel personifies Kenneth Tynan's initial speculation that Garbo may have been a brilliant female impersonator.[105] What would it mean, Carter seems to ask, if one of culture's most celebrated female stars, the epitome of stereotypical femininity were after all male? Tennant's novel intimates that only a pact with the devil could account for the seemingly timeless image of beauty, and that if a woman actually had to 'live' her static image, gothic consequences would ensue. A tribute to a glamorous by-gone age, "the decadence of this English country house, given over to the worship of dead icons" (*F*, p.65), provides an apt description too of Tristessa's glass house. Yet, in the anaesthetising effect of such female representation, the phrase "dead icons" is soon revealed to be a tautology. In both *Faustine* and *The Passion of New Eve*, 'freakish' images come into view once the patina

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[103] Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989 [essay 1975]), p.20.

[104] Barthes, Roland, "The Face of Garbo" in Mast, Gerald and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979; 2nd edition), pp.720-21 (p.720).

[105] Kenneth Tynan, "Garbo" (1953) in Mast and Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism*, pp. 722-27. In fact Carter's novel also mimics Garbo's story in that she changed her name from "Gustaffson" to "Garbo", a Swedish word meaning "sprite" - much as Carter's character chooses the abstract name meaning "sadness".

of glamour is removed.

The 'impersonality' paradoxically implied in the cult of the screen personality also distinguishes Tristessa and Lisa Crane as postmodern phenomena. As cinema stars, their anonymous and elusive identities accord with Jameson's "rush of filmic images without density".[106] Clear individual subjectivity is lost through repetition, rendering the stars impersonal; both characters for instance are seemingly "anonymous in the disintegration of personality that comes with old age". (*F*, p.41) Just as her screen identitites obfuscate the perception of the 'real' Tristessa, Lisa Crane's costume roles similarly confuse Ella's quest for her grandmother: "under all the masks of a quarter of a century ago, the fancy dress of the decade of Revolution...[w]as this the real Lisa, then? (*F*, pp.56-7) The girl's question is as much about issues of identity in general, as it is about the phenomenon of the star system. Looking for the "truth" (p.57) behind the "masks" infers that an essential self is practicably discoverable. Reminiscent of Plath's line, "My selves dissolving, old whore petticoats",[107] which engages with this question of identity formation, Ella's search for a definitive presence of Lisa Crane is deferred in the diverse forms of the star's representation. Tennant's narrative expresses this sense of temporal and spatial dislocation through a specifically postmodern idiom: the stars are gothic heroines in "the age of the throwaway" which sees endless replications of the image, until "beauty was reduced to meaning nothing at all". (*F*, p.25) Physical descriptions of Tennant's film star confirm that as an individual she has ostensibly vanished in a world of disposable commodities; hence Lisa is said to have "eyes the cheap blue of pictures that come plopping out of a polaroid or an airport machine." (*F*, p.26) The Pop art style of her appearance is symptomatic of a "throwaway" culture and its privileging of the means of mass production over the individual.

In *Faustine*, the diminished presence implied in the dissemination of Ella's grandmother's image compounds the fact that she is also physically missing. Lisa Crane's absence haunts the house, but her image itself is

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[106] *Postmodernism*, p.34.

[107] "Fever 103°", l.53.

already haunted by the operation of replication and commodification. And this is where the notion of "camp" becomes pertinent to an exploration of postmodern gothic. Ross considers the redemptive role which camp can play in this disposable age:

> A throwaway culture...contains messages about the *historical* production of the material conditions of taste. This knowledge about history is the precise moment when camp takes over, because camp involves a rediscovery of history's waste.[108]

In their exaggerated Hollywood personas and evident social redundancy, Tristessa and Lisa Crane can profitably be considered as figures of 'camp-gothic'.[109]

Securing an understanding of camp as an aesthetic category, and in terms of its socio-political concerns, can however prove difficult. Sontag's seminal essay, "Notes on Camp", establishes several definitions, among them "being-as-playing-a-role".[110] Camp's attraction for contemporary writers is not surprising. The writers' interest in performative notions of identity has already been noted in previous chapters, and Ross argues that camp also played "a considerable if inadvertent role in the upsurge of feminist consciousness in the late 1960s".[111] Furthermore, Cynthia Morrill describes

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[108] Ross, Andrew, *No Respect*, p.151.

[109] Kenyon has argued that this is in fact the 'natural' mode of Carter's writing, a view suggested by "the increasingly bizarre extravagance of her plots". Kenyon, p.21. Kenyon intends this account of Carter's work to support her line that Carter belongs to a "Female Gothic" tradition.

[110] Sontag, Susan, "Notes on 'Camp'" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967), p. 280. Sontag's definitions of "camp" in this essay have since been qualified and challenged by many critics. Andrew Ross, for example, points out that while Sontag had characterised camp as "apolitical", she later amended this view, stating that camp had had "a considerable if inadvertent role in the upsurge of feminist consciousness in the late 1960s". Moe Meyer and Cynthia Morrill both regard Sontag's distinction of camp as "gay-sensibility" as ahistorical, and limited to "the presumption that Camp is a discursive mode offered to heterosexuals as a means for homosexuals to gain acceptance." See Ross, *No Respect* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), p. 161; Meyer, Moe (ed), *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 8, 115-16. Chuck Kleinhans meanwhile is right to negotiate a position between those who call for a re-politicisation of camp and Sontag's conception of camp aesthetics devoid of gender politics. He argues that insufficient acknowledgement has been made by queer theorists of the diverse appropriations of camp distinct from gay male culture. See "Taking Out the Trash: Camp and the Politics of Parody", in Meyer, pp.182-201. Meyer consequently makes a distinction between "queer Camp" and "Pop Camp".

[111] Ross, p.161. Most obviously camp played a role in challenging preconceived notions of gender identities.

how feminist postmodernist critics (including critically-engaged novelists such as Carter and Tennant) use images of camp as a means of emphasis or to reproduce dominant (heterosexist) culture's "discursive metaphors".[112] We have seen how writers of the feminist gothic frequently depict patriarchal structures, particularly "discursive metaphors", in order then to explore issues of complicity and subversion of those structures. In its italicising effects, camp clearly provides a means of highlighting certain tropes in their fiction.

Camp has been distinguished as an "eminently postmodern form"[113] and one which "embodies parody as a general mode of discourse".[114] Hence, in these two novels the narrative describes the 'larger-than-life' film star in camp terms of hyperbole: Tristessa is called "Our Lady of the Sorrows" (*PNE*, p.122) and Lisa Crane "the Empress of the Air". (*F*, p.121) As in the case of the sculpted body in Weldon's *She-Devil*, Carter and Tennant subsequently recount the *history* of the material person behind the ostentatious epithet. "Camp is an ironic and parodic appreciation of an extravagant form that is out of proportion to its content, especially when that content is banal or trivial."[115] Kleinhans' dissection of camp accounts for the contrast between the bathos of Lisa Crane's real geriatric condition, Tristessa's male physicality *and* the extravagant performance of their masquerade. Camp inflates the image of the film star before the narrative un-masks the figure as a 'mortal', hence material, being. Ross' soundbite of camp aesthetics might easily refer to the female star herself: "the glamor of resurrection irradiates this ragbag material".[116] Moreover, the gothic in this regard seems a natural companion to camp style since the genre in its clichéd form already seems "out of proportion".

To characterise Carter's and Tennant's figures as camp-gothic is to highlight a structural similarity between the two styles or genres: the

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[112] Morrill, Cynthia, "Revamping the Gay Sensibility: Queer Camp and *dyke noir*" in Meyer, Moe (ed), *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.112.

[113] Morrill, p.110.

[114] Kleinhans, in Meyer, p.188.

[115] Kleinhans, p.186.

[116] Ross, p.151.

'haunting' inherent to representation in relation to camp cinema and the gothic. Camp depends for its effects on a historical or temporal distance from its subject's moment of fame; Tennant's and Carter's stars are camp because their heyday is in the past. One view characterises the object of camp as a "fossilized remnant".[117] Akin to Jameson's sediment,[118] a temporal dissonance is at work in the camp aesthetic whereby the products of an earlier mode of production are perceptible within camp's forms. Consequently camp tropes are both "allusive and elusive" in relation to some original (following Jameson's characterisation of postmodernism's attitude toward genres), since there is a ghostly absence at the heart of camp - either through a temporal shift in taste or the erasure of a gay sensibility.[119] Camp tropes are, in this sense, haunted already.

Indeed, the language of camp theorisation occasionally belies a relation to gothic. Ross writes of a "necrophilic economy" which "underpins camp sensibility...in its amorous resurrection of deceased cultural forms".[120] The characterisation of Tristessa and Lisa Crane as "dead" depends on this sensibility, this conception of conventional imagery associated with the female body, as much as the contrast between the perfect cinematic body of the past and the mortal figure of the present. Evelyn admires Tristessa in these terms: "Your face an invitation to necrophilia" (*PNE*, p.121), and later as "that face of an exquisite corpse". (*PNE*, p.124) Desire aroused by shapes of the dead is in fact revealed as the very source of the attraction of the cinema and its camp stars. Cinema is construed as postmodernism's haunted house, as "the coil

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[117] Meyer, p.14.

[118] Carter's conflation of gothic funeral bier with well-known personalities from American and British popular culture provides an excellent example of Jameson's argument with regard to contemporary use of genre. The props of old gothic, a sense of the modern grotesque, and the fantasy surrounding dead film stars are "sedimented" in the novel's scene which creates a precarious balance between the ghoulish and the kitsch. Like camp itself, this scene is undecided between a posture of reverence and one of ridicule.

[119] It is worth noting that "the appropriation of Camp as a theoretical strategy for the interests of postmodern and/or feminist deconstruction follows a troublesome critical tradition of refashioning queer subculture into dominant culture's discursive metaphors." This is a charge which might be levelled at Carter for instance, since despite the camp sensibility surrounding Tristessa, the scene of his/her copulation with Eve/lyn in the desert is ultimately heterosexual in its procreative results. Morrill, p.112.

[120] Ross, p.152.

of film has, as it were, lassooed inert phenomena from which the present had departed, and when projected upon a screen, they are granted a temporary revivification." Having recognised this fact herself, Carter provides her own explanation for the metaphoric perception of cinema as necrophilia; in *Doctor Hoffman*, the peep-show proprietor quotes his student Mendoza to Desiderio: "'Lumière was not the father of cinema; it was Sergeant Bertrand, the violator of graves.'" (p.102)

At the centre of this matrix of the postmodern gothic and camp sensibility in the two novels, the spectral figure focuses issues of representation and subjectivity. Firstly, representation is commonly figured as a form of death in its effects of petrification - for the film star, it is the "engine that killed her". In Tennant's *Woman Beware Woman*, the character Minnie equates the shooting of a gun with the shooting of a film; she envies Fran her power to "hold the world in a frame and freeze it dead". (*WBW*, p.174) In Tristessa's mausoleum, the aging film star has tried to kill herself into a petrified image of feminine beauty which will persist as long as her photographed image survives, just as Lisa Crane's "beauty [is] more frozen now and hard". (*F*, p.77)

Secondly, insofar as they are representations of dead figures, both the wax model and the cinematic body also incorporate the impression of absence signified by presence. In a crucial paradox, the resemblance of Tristessa's inert body to the bodies of wax emphasises the very materiality of this star who has been absent from public view and from contemporary cinema. At the same time, her attempt to feign a likeness to her creations in the Hall of the Immortals makes her invisible in one sense, in her bid to be *not* there.[121] The pretence of death depicted in the wax models is relevant to a reading of the gothic and to an understanding of the operation of representation. The powerful effect of the simulated corpse in this scene is succinctly put by

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[121] The relation of the artist to the artwork in Carter's novel resembles Gallop's conclusion regarding Barthes' concept of the "death of the author", in which she argues that if the author is "dead", then this indicates not only an absence from the authored text, but also a material embodiment, elsewhere, implied by that death. Gallop, p.19. Also, the wax model's earlier history - to render religious relics of saints - neatly illustrates the impulse to give material presence to what is considered transcendent (and therefore disembodied).

Blanchot: "The cadaverous presence establishes a relationship between here and nowhere."[122] The presence of "here" and the absence implied in "nowhere" are present in the posthuman body at the same time. And it is this 'gap' that Blanchot shows to be a condition of representation, as it is the defining feature of an 'image'.

Blanchot shares Derrida's view that language exhibits a kind of ghostliness. For Lisa Crane's "mausoleum of the image" exemplifies Derrida's hypothesis of the "double genetive", in which a spectral operation of *différance* moves back and forth between the two terms. Thus Tennant's novel presents an image of a mausoleum, but it also exemplifies how the image itself is a mausoleum. Absence is always present in the representation of presence: "the security of presence in the metaphorical form of ideality arises and is set forth again upon this irreducible void [absence]."[123]

This concept of a gap or void at the heart of representation has logical implications for the fictional rendering of subjectivity's 'formation'. The metaphorical form in which Tennant and Carter have cast their protagonists self-consciously enacts the structure outlined by Derrida. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Evelyn muses on the difference between desire for a 'tangible' Tristessa and desire for her image:

> She had been the dream itself made flesh though the flesh I knew her in was not flesh itself but only a moving picture of flesh, real but not substantial. (*PNE*, p.8)

Carter represents the near imperceptibility of the female body on the cinema screen, presenting another posthuman simulation of the female body in which the body is perceived as distanced. Descriptions of the two stars hint that their actual presence is so remote from the cinema image that they become identified with the cinema screen itself, and they are portrayed as hardly existing in any perceptibly physical form. Thus Tristessa's body becomes

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[122] And this is already implicated in the gothic's set of fears: "we do not cohabit with the dead for fear of seeing *here* collapse into the unfathomable *nowhere* - a fall the House of Usher illustrates." Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature* trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982 [1955]), pp.256, 259. Bronfen explains further that "what makes the 'pure and simple' resemblance of the cadaver to itself so *haunting* is that its point of reference is absolutely *nothing*." Bronfen paraphrasing Blanchot, p.104, emphasis added.

[123] Derrida, Introduction to *Speech and Phenomena: and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1967]), p.7.

identified with a screen, when Evelyn confronts the 'real' star: "It was as if all Tristessa's movies were being projected all at once on that pale, reclining figure so I saw her walking, speaking, dying, over and over again". (*PNE*, p.119) Evelyn literally watches the star's image in her roles as gothic heroine, at the same time as seeing the physical actress. Similarly, in "The Merchant of Shadows", the "Spirit" is so closely identified with the cinema screen that she suffers the gaze of the cinema-going public directly: "They wore away her face by looking at it too much".[124] Conversely, the scratches which Evelyn detects on the film - "rain upon the screen" (*PNE*, p.5) - are like scars on a body. The body as screen also repeats the image of the "visitor with flesh of glass" in *Doctor Hoffman*, in its double embodiment of the frame and subject of projection. And in this instance, reading the iconography of a female body and comprehending the vocabulary of the cinema become indistinguishable acts:

> watching a film...woman of transparent flesh, so that the exquisite filigree of the skeleton was revealed quite clearly...a language of signs which utterly bemused me. (*DrH*, p.25)

Pared down to a mere skeleton, this figure of a woman is notably "exquisite", providing another example of an essentialising effect of the male gaze.

In forms as refined and translucent as the latter, the cinema star signifies absence in her 'worn away' appearance. Carter combines this spectral quality with an exploration of the relationship between representation and reality. So, when Evelyn looks at the waxworks, she begins to consider the cinematic image in terms of the revenant - Tristessa's apparent corpse is "like her own reflection on the screen", and "[i]t was as if all Tristessa's movies were being projected all at once on that pale, reclining figure...in a perpetual resurrection of the spirit." (p.119) The perception of cinema as ghostly projection denotes its star performers as ghosts. Thus, comparable descriptions in Tennant and Carter gesture towards a state of disembodiedness: Ella notes "paper-thin skin", her mother's skin is "dry and papery" (*F*, pp.50, 113), while Evelyn sees that Tristessa has "skin that seemed thinner than rice paper". (*PNE*, p.123) The inferred presence of the female

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[124] "The Merchant of Shadows", p.194.

body in these instances is pared to a trace.[125]

In *The Passion of New Eve*, if the cinema star is 'real' (she "might have been the invention of all our imaginations", Evelyn worries), this could only take the form of a trace of a figure - a "spectacular wraith". (*PNE*,p.118) Carter chooses her words carefully, as usual, so that it is the ghostly effect of Tristessa *before* her death which is emphasised since 'wraith' denotes a premonitional appearance before a person dies. This image of death-in-life is produced by the glare in which Tristessa has lived. The common etymology of 'spectacular' and 'spectre' (*spectare* - to behold) hints at a negligible distinction between cinematic and ghostly figures. In fact, Carter's language betrays a sophisticated sense of this alliance. Describing Tristessa, she writes that it is

> as if the camera had stolen not the soul, but her body and left behind a presence like an absence that lived, now, only in a quiet, ghostly, hypersensitised world of its own. (*PNE*, p.123)

Tristessa's "tangible insubstantiality" (p.123) - she is her own shadow, "a presence like an absence" - takes us to the heart of Blanchot's thesis that an image is "the thing as distance, present in its absence, graspable because ungraspable, appearing as disappeared."[126]

Finally, this dematerialising of the cinematic body, through metaphors of light, paper, and ghosts, may be seen to belong within a dialectic which constitutes female identity. In a model which accords with many of Plath's figurations, female subjectivity is said to be predicated on both "aggressive solidification of the object-body" and "the violent decorporealization of the flesh".[127] From the "solidification" of the sculpted body to the "decorporealizing" of the cinematic body, and a balance between them achieved in the wax figures, the posthuman figure incorporates a 'post' human condition - a condition perpetuated by surgical reconstruction and

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[125] Near invisible images of women who have a similarly haunting effect include Gala's and Jane Wild's appearance in *The Bad Sister* as "invisible except for our laughter, our nervous systems, our X-ray spines" (p.184); and the phantom which visits Desiderio and its "miraculous bouquet of bone". (*DrH* p.26)

[126] Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature*, p.256.

[127] Barker, Francis, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (London: Methuen, 1984), p.103.

technological simulation, but ultimately a condition beyond representation. Accordingly, Eve contemplates the spectral elusiveness of the film star, Tristessa:

> to go beyond the boundaries of flesh had been your occupation and so you had become nothing, a wraith that left only traces of a silver powder on the hands that clutched helplessly at your perpetual vanishings. (*PNE*, p.110)

# CONCLUSION

"What is then the spectrum of possibilities of the possibility of specters?", asks Derrida in *The Truth in Painting.*[1] This question can be seen to animate the argument of this thesis, a study in which both the spectrum of gothic meaning and the contemporary guise of the spectre are addressed. While the scope of the gothic spectrum has proved to be immensely diverse, a striking number of figures surface as common images in the fiction of Carter, Tennant, and Weldon. Inscribed in a postmodern framework, these gothic tropes participate in the revision of several discursive traditions: poststructuralist perspectives on cultural discourses including history, colonialism, and medical science inform the novels discussed. Consequently, fragments of the gothic are employed as part of a critical engagement with these discourses.

Within these rhetorical frameworks, the iconography of the body which Carter, Tennant, and Weldon share comments on traditional forms of representation of the female figure. A significant motif which emerges in relation to all three of the figures explored in the preceding chapters is that of rape. Having noted the highly 'textual' treatment of these figures, questions follow as it becomes clear that rape is depicted as a textual event. Presented in a highly stylised and fantastic context, this gothic motif is emptied of any realist impact. The repeated configuration of male invasion and investigation of the female figure does not readily effect what Jordan termed the "gothic excitement of rape".[2] The parodic and 'constructed' nature of this motif provides a starting point for debate concerning issues of complicity and subversion in contemporary women's writing.

A feminist reading of specific tropes of the female figure uncovers a seam of gothic meaning when a disavowed history of that figure is explored. The novels discussed in this thesis encourage such an interpretation

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[1] Derrida, Jacques, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1987 [1978]), p.374.

[2] See Chapter 2 in discussion of 'Female' Gothic .

themselves in their presentation of re-historicised images as the principal female characters. In the case of the Mary Queen of Scots figure, reading its associations of Catholicism, national alterity, and colour symbolism amplifies the figure's impact in relation to the gothic. Jameson's exhortation to "always Historize" carries implications on a more intimate scale in Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, in which two 'transsexuals' disclose traces of an other gendered past. Whether it is 'History' or 'history' which emerges in these narratives, the experience of pain and violence is crucial to the animation of the optical "metaphor-into-narrative" and thus to the identification of the contemporary gothic.

Breaking open the images of perfect femininity, Carter, Tennant, and Weldon prove that, as Salman Rushdie has written, "life has been transmuted into grotesquery by the irruption into it of history".[3] Hence, Carter's historical reading of a poetic symbol in "Black Venus" leads to grotesque images of Jeanne Duval. The wax models in Chapter 5 tell a similar story in their display of both violent fragmentation and the pristine surfaces of completeness. Both figures then disrupt a corporeal dialectic in which the inside and outside of the female body is perceived in terms of horror and attraction. In this intervention in traditional figuration, the gothic does not only colour the prominent tropes of metanarratives. Through their use of the fantastic, the writers also forge new understandings of the genre, as their descriptions of the sculpted body, for instance, locate the gothic in certain practices of contemporary medical science. An understanding then of the genre in their work rests on a feminist poetics and an historical materialism.

Indeed, when Moers read Plath's poetry in relation to the modern gothic, she could not have foreseen the diversity of gothic traces which would emerge in women's fiction of the contemporary period. The feminist gothic looks back - to Plath, to sideshows of the 1930s, to Dickens, to Bluebeard, for instance - *and* looks forward - to the possibilities of further shapes of the 'posthuman'. Moreover, the three writers demonstrate an eclectic and intellectual engagement with the genre, evidenced by their invocation of Freud,

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[3] *Midnight's Children* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), p.57.

European art, and poststructuralist notions of subjectivity. Their novels incorporate a critique of gothic structures and motifs even as they fashion inventive designs out of their contemporary perceptions of the genre.

The "possibility of specters" meanwhile, included in Derrida's question, arises out of the discursive frames embedded in the genre's sedimentation. One form of the spectral is particularly striking in the novels by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon, and may be regarded as a central feature of the contemporary feminist gothic. To alter Emily Dickinson's expression, "the self-hauntings of [feminist] gothic fiction are...essential to [feminist] art.[4] Exploration of those forces which occasion this female self-distance, such as male-authored models of female identity, leads to a description of institutional and figurative "husks" which enclose the female figure. Many of the figures discussed in the preceding chapters, experience the "ghostly effect" of self-alienation as intolerable. This perception is not founded on the traditional gothic's passion for horror, but rather indicates a deadening effect against which the female subject must struggle.

Thus it is not only the imagery of Plath's poetry which finds resonance in Carter's, Tennant's, and Weldon's writing, but the constitution of female subjectivity suggested by the lyric "I" in those poems. The iconographic figures central to this thesis incorporate shapes similar to those in Plath. Accordingly, Chapters 3 to 5 inscribe a movement from the emphasised material presence of the chokered body, to the cinematic body in which absence is figured by the spectral. Hence the chokered figures embody a state of corporeal incarceration overlaid with a sense of cultural confinement; just as the 'disembodied' image of the Virgin Mary is reconstrued by Plath as "Blubbery Mary", so the figure of Mother in *The Passion of New Eve* is a

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[4] "The self-hauntings of (female) gothic fiction are...essential to (female) art." quoted by Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, pp.585-6, summarising the views of Emily Dickinson (from her *Letters, vol.2*). When Dickinson wrote, "Nature is a Haunted house - but Art - a House that tries to be haunted", she highlighted the dependence on gothic metaphors of the relationship between "the Me and the Not-me". As Gilbert and Gubar observe, this statement also indicates an awareness of literary inheritance and the "interdependence of self-dramatization, self-creation, and literary creation."

"symbol made flesh". The possibility of escaping such bodily encasements is suggested by the images of shadows and husks in Chapter 4, and in strategies of resistance including speech and performance. In the definitions of a self given in Plath's "Poem for a Birthday", one finds a similar impression of malleability enveloped in a thin, but restrictive carapace:

> I housekeep in Time's gut-end
> Among emmets and mollusks,
> Duchess of Nothing,
> Hairtusk's bride.[5]

Like *Faustine*'s, "Empress of the Air" (p. 121) and the "Empress of the Exotic" in *Doctor Hoffman* (p.166), Plath's "Duchess" presides over an empire that is not a physical domain, but "air" and "nothing". The business of 'keeping house', while it suggests predetermined roles, such as that of the "bride", also invokes a constant negotiation between compliance and escape. It is in these 'shells' and 'husks' that we trace the cultural identities assumed and abandoned by the female self.

Carter's Evelyn feels alienated from his surgically-reconstructed body and responds to the lack of a distinct gender by describing him/herself as "this unfleshed other whom I was". (*PNE*, p.83) In Chapter 5, figures of the female body voice a position of absence. Speaking from a position of 'elsewhere', the transsexual in Carter's novel shares the ontological paradox of the speaker in Plath's "Bee Meeting":

> Whose is that long white box in the grove, what have they accomplished, why am I cold.[6]

At a distance from the embodied self, this voice speaks from an imagined space of 'after death'. Featured in Chapter 5, the self "appearing as disappeared"[7] projects a transcendence of representation itself. Tristessa's "perpetual resurrection" (*PNE*, p.119) corresponds to the dialectic in Plath's poetry between immanence and transcendence. To escape momentarily the "brood cells" of representation, as Plath's poem "Stings" suggests, is to "fly" over *Faustine*'s "mausoleum of the image".

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[5] "Poem for a Birthday", *The Beast*, ll.23-26.

[6] "The Bee Meeting", ll.63-64.

[7] Blanchot, p.256.

Jacqueline Rose reads this figuration of transcendence in Plath's poetry not in terms of "the positive or negative, creative or destructive attributes of this figure", but rather emphasises Plath's achievement in inscribing the "possibility" of this figure in the first place, particularly in the absence of "a term for an identity free of the worst forms of social oppression which does not propel us beyond the bounds of identity in any recognisable form."[8] The iconography evident in the gothic figures represented by Carter, Tennant, and Weldon conveys this same 'impossible' tension: an engagement with the cultural "bounds" of discursive metaphors that intersects with a vision of subjectivity liberated from them. In contemporary feminist fiction the female subject's repeated bid for transcendence, central to Plath's poetics, is figured by a beautiful and violent queen:

> More terrible than she ever was, red
> Scar in the sky, red comet.[9]

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[8] Rose, see esp. pp.148-50.

[9] "Stings", ll.57-58.

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